



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER  
AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY**

(Reference: [Inquiry into unpaid work](#))

**Members:**

**MR J MILLIGAN (Chair)  
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)  
MISS LAURA NUTTALL**

**PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 3 JULY 2024**

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**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms S Milne (Ph: 620 50435)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 9.29 am**

**GIESE, MS JEAN**, Chief Executive Officer, VolunteeringACT

**THE CHAIR:** I declare open the first of two planned public hearings of the Standing Committee on the Economy and Gender and Economic Equality for its inquiry into unpaid work. The committee will hear from a range of academics and organisations.

I now welcome our first witness appearing today, Ms Giese from VolunteeringACT. On behalf of the committee, welcome and thank you for your submission to the inquiry. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast on the web and webstreamed live. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement before you. Have you seen and read that privilege statement and do you agree to it?

**Ms Giese:** I do.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. Would you like to start off with an opening statement or comment, or would you like to go straight to questions?

**Ms Giese:** I would love to start with an opening statement. My role is CEO of VolunteeringACT, and I would like to thank you for the invitation to present to the committee today. VolunteeringACT are the peak body for volunteering. We also provide community information services across the Canberra region. Our vision is of an inclusive Canberra and our mission is to foster inclusion by enabling participation and connection.

We were delighted to see this inquiry and its reference to volunteering as specifically an unpaid work category. Our submission sets out the need for the ACT to have very clear definitions and for correct terminology to be used within this broad area. We frequently hear “volunteering” described as similar yet different activities, including placements for students, court-ordered volunteering as community service, volunteering internships or volunteering for work experience, and some even class caring responsibilities as volunteering. Although all these terms describe different forms of unpaid work, they are not interchangeable with the term “volunteering” and should not in fact be used that way.

It is important to recognise that, unlike most other forms of paid work, volunteers are primarily motivated for very different reasons—often by a desire to contribute to their community—and they are exercising an individual choice, which is in line with the current national definition of volunteering, which is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain. This encompasses a diverse range of activities, including formal volunteering but also volunteering that occurs more informally outside of an organisation or a structured group. Those definitions really matter to ensure that volunteering in the ACT is safe, ethical and not exploitative. To ensure the wellbeing of volunteers, we encourage all organisations who involve them to have appropriate policies and safeguards in place that are in line with the national standards for volunteer involvement.

Our submission, as you will have seen, highlights the enormous contribution that volunteering makes to the ACT and the social and economic benefits that it brings, which has been highlighted through the *State of volunteering in the ACT* report, which I understand the committee has also been given as supplementary material.

Volunteering differs from most other forms of paid work through that significant positive wellbeing and social outcome that it provides to so many people across Canberra. Volunteering is a recognised indicator of social cohesion, a significant and powerful contributor to social connectedness and it has a dual impact of improving the wellbeing of people undertaking volunteering as well as volunteering activities themselves contributing to enhancing the wellbeing of others. We know that it is proven to help individuals develop stronger social networks and interpersonal relationships, improve self-esteem, relieve stress, alleviate symptoms of depression and help with mental health recovery.

We need to say, though, that, while volunteers offer their time willingly for free, there are costs associated with running volunteer programs and they need adequate funding to ensure their viability. Our submission recommends that the ACT government ensures that the full cost of volunteer programs is funded as standard within relevant serving funding agreements as a way to reduce those out-of-pocket expenses and cost barriers for volunteers.

Finally, we feel the inquiry presents a timely opportunity for us to increase understanding and recognition of the contribution of volunteering to the ACT and changing the way that it is perceived. We currently have a draft ACT volunteering strategy. It has been co-designed with the volunteering sector in partnership with the ACT government and provides a clear road map for our region to respond to sector priorities. The strategy is currently going through the exposure draft process and will be coming to cabinet in August this year. We strongly recommend that it is supported across all ministerial portfolio areas and ACT government directorates as a coordinated approach to supporting and enhancing volunteering. Thank you again for the invitation to talk to you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your opening statement. Within that statement you mentioned that volunteers are motivated to participate in volunteering based on their own interests and willingness to help. You also mentioned that sometimes they can be exploited and taken for granted. Can you elaborate a little bit more on that?

**Ms Giese:** It is quite a multifaceted issue. We know that volunteers volunteer for a variety of reasons and, sitting underneath that, of course, what we hope is a choice. So it is really important that when people stand up and say, “I feel really connected to this organisation and I really want to give them my time. I believe in what they are doing, and I want to support them to do that,” that there is not any sense that they are not able to be there by choice. The reason we say that is that, sadly, we quite often hear that people are in fact being put into a role to replace a paid worker under the guise of saving money. Therefore, volunteers enter an organisation with absolutely the right intent but then actually end up being exploited, which is absolutely not okay.

We also hear that quite often there are education institutions or mandatory government programs where they use the term “volunteering” but it is not actually volunteering; it is: “To be eligible for this, you must volunteer.” There are so many different scenarios—and, sadly, we do not have the time to interrogate them—but we would argue that any time that somebody does not feel that they have the choice to be there or if they are actually in a role where they are replacing a paid worker, all of that is not volunteering. We always encourage organisations to come to us so that we can help them really massage out whether the role is a genuine volunteering role or whether it actually just fits within one of those other markers that I spoke about earlier.

It is very clear that within the community those lines can be blurred. The minute that it does not meet those three criteria that are in the national definition, we would say it is not volunteering. If people are not giving their time willingly—and, sadly, that happens with young people more often than we hear it necessarily across other age cohorts—we would argue that that is not volunteering. If it is something that you were made to do to receive another benefit, that is not time willingly given. There also has to be that match to it being for the common good. That is why volunteering doesn’t and shouldn’t exist in big corporates that are there for their stakeholders and not there for the common good and without financial gain. If you are being paid, then it is no longer a volunteering role—with that nuance that we do want volunteers to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses. We do not want them to be financially disadvantaged by volunteering.

**THE CHAIR:** I guess if the volunteer is pushed too far, you risk losing them, and the organisation would, I guess, really be behind the eight ball then because they do not have personnel there helping that organisation out.

**Ms Giese:** That is right. My sector colleagues will no doubt talk about what we are referring to as the starvation cycle that exists within the community sector at the moment, where the funding that we receive to run services is starving ourselves. So we are going further and further behind every year in terms of being able to run services. One of the unintended consequences of that happening is that volunteers are being asked to do more and more. The risk there is that volunteers are becoming more and more burnt out. They are also becoming less interested in staying with an organisation because they are feeling like the expectation is too high and they are being asked to incur out of pocket expenses, which are totally inappropriate.

The *State of volunteering* research shows very clearly that the amount of money per hour that volunteers are actually being asked to pay to volunteer is \$12.76 per hour. So, for every hour that a volunteer volunteers in Canberra, they are \$12.76 out of pocket—meaning that volunteering, in and of itself, becomes more difficult to actually engage in. People are absolutely standing up and wanting to help, but organisations do not have the funding to run programs, and one of the costs that organisations are not able to cover is the cost of supporting the out-of-pocket expenses of their volunteers. We are seeing that that has had an impact and will continue to have an impact on volunteers in the city, particularly in the community sector. There are more volunteers in that workforce than there are employees. So it is critical that we get this right and that we make sure that the cost of volunteer management and the cost of involving volunteers is properly included in funding agreements moving forward.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Can you give some examples of the kind of out-of-pocket costs that volunteers tend to face, understanding that it is a fairly broad sort of sector?

**Ms Giese:** That is right, and obviously, the research had to take an average of the different types of costs that people are incurring. It depends on the volunteering role, but it is everything from training costs to petrol costs to uniforms. It is all the things that volunteers need to be able to undertake the volunteering roles that are out-of-pocket expenses for them. The more expensive it is for people to volunteer, the less likely they are to turn up. That will result in fewer people in the city. That is a huge financial burden that we need to make sure is covered.

Right now, the research very clearly shows that it is about fifty-fifty. So the organisation is incurring about 50 per cent of the cost and the individual volunteer is taking 50 per cent of the cost. These are not sustainable numbers. They are just not. It is not going to be something that these programs can withstand and that individuals can withstand, noting the cost-of-living pressures that everyone in the city is facing.

**MISS NUTTALL:** In the context of exploitation and managing the risks of exploitation, what are the formal and informal pathways between volunteer work and paid work? Are there certain lines that you have to tread so that there is not a presumption that someone is volunteering looking to get a paid job, and that might put a hand on the scales?

**Ms Giese:** Absolutely. Again, that is why we encourage organisations in the city—this is our bread and butter—to come to us to ensure that they are actually making the proper distinction between a volunteering role and a paid employment role. But one of the most common scenarios we see is that there are people in paid roles and people in volunteer roles and they are actually doing the same role but they have different titles. That is a very clear example of where we say, “Hang on; why are you paying that person, but you are not paying this person?” Sadly, as we see more and more organisations are struggling with the amount of funding that they need to run their services, we are seeing more paid roles become volunteer roles, which can, of course, be okay. If you have no government funding and the structure of your organisation is set out differently, of course, all of your people that support you are going to be volunteers.

But, as funding comes in, and as the structure of the organisation changes, that is when you need to be able to identify what is actually an appropriate volunteering role and what is a paid role. Again, there are national standards that sit around that that are very clear, to be able to look at that distinction. We do not want organisations having to wear that burden themselves. So they can come to us at any time, and we can provide them with that advice.

To answer the other part of your question, we do not want to take away the value of volunteering as a pathway to employment. It is just that roles must be crafted in a way that ensures that they meet the standard of what is an appropriate volunteering role. But we know that volunteering is an absolutely brilliant, legitimate pathway to paid

employment. It is just that we do not want people to then take that as a message of “You can have volunteers in your paid roles and you do not pay them while you test whether or not they are good at their jobs, and then if they are you might create a paid role for them.” There are very blurred lines. It is about making sure that organisations are thinking about what is actually a paid function in their organisation and what is an appropriate role to give to a volunteer, understanding that volunteers do not have the same protections that employees have, other than, with very few exceptions, around WHS and those types of things.

Also, we would never want to discourage organisations to think of volunteering as a pathway to employment and we want to make sure that they are having discussions with their volunteers around, “What is that you want from paid employment, your career, and how can we help you build and craft a volunteering role as a pathway to get there?” We run lots of programs around pathways to employment. Again, we are more than happy to help organisations identify what those nuances are and make sure that they are properly distinguishing between them.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Beautiful. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Have you heard of many organisations that really struggle with insurances? Is that a big concern for organisations that do—

**Ms Giese:** Yes; absolutely—all the time. It is not a perfect way of phrasing it, but I spoke earlier about the starvation cycle that the community sector in particular is facing, and that the funding is not growing at that same rate as the amount of people that are accessing and the costs of delivering services. Organisations are certainly feeling like every year they are going further and further backwards. The peaks have collectively done some really great work in articulating that on behalf of the sector. Also, the *Counting the costs report* and the sector sustainability work are both really integral in understanding the costs that organisations are facing. One of them is, of course, insurance.

I would also say that there is an increasing compliance burden on organisations. It feels like every week there is a new piece of legislation that has come in that organisations need to meet, and it almost never comes with any funding to help the capacity-building of the sector to be able to deal with those changes. For instance, the Fair Work Commission have outlined a whole suite of changes that the sector has to face. They are all things that we need to and have to address as really important measures for our teams collectively. The more that these things happen and the more that our funding continues to go backwards, it becomes increasingly more and more difficult to be able to make provisions for things like adequate and proper insurance.

Of course, insurance, as it relates to volunteering is even more complicated, because you need to make sure that you have the right insurance levels to be able to cover your volunteers and to be able to cover your volunteer directors. Many of the services in the sector—in fact, most I would say—have an unpaid board. It is all of these costs that continue to increase. The compliance cost continues to increase. I am not, in any way, advocating that we should not do that. It is an incredibly important protection. But things are becoming much more difficult, and organisations are having to make decisions about what they do and do not fund and what they do and do not tackle in



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terms of compliance burden. It is certainly a key issue that we and ACTCOSS and other peaks are trying to address in terms of trying to support the sector to be able to deal with the ever-changing universe we are living in.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing today. We have come to the end of our session. I am sure we could continue to speak for quite some time going forward. But thank you for appearing today on behalf of VolunteeringACT. You will be provided with a transcript of the hearing this morning. Please go through it and, if there any amendments, please make us aware. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today.

**Short suspension.**

**ELLIOTT, MS VERONICA**, Executive Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations

**McLEAN, MS JULIE**, Policy Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations

**THE CHAIR:** We now move to our second session this morning. We are joined by Ms Elliott and Ms McLean from the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your submission and for taking the time today to appear at this hearing. I would like to remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. No doubt that statement has been sent to you. Could you confirm whether you agree to that privilege statement.

**Ms Elliott:** I agree to that privilege statement.

**Ms McLean:** I agree to that too.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Would you like to start with a brief opening statement or would you like to go straight to questions?

**Ms Elliott:** I will make a brief opening statement, if that is okay. I will start by saying that we are the peak body for public school P&C associations in the ACT. We have two functions. Firstly, we provide support to the P&Cs, help them operate as effectively as they can and provide some advice and guidance. Secondly, we represent the voice of public-school parents to government. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today at this committee hearing.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Elliott. Ms McLean, would you like to mention anything or would you like to go straight to questions?

**Ms McLean:** We could go straight to questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. Thank you very much. In your submission, I note recommendation 2, which suggests:

Access Canberra should become more user friendly and move to an online system to help volunteer organisations, such as P&Cs meet their regulatory obligations.

Could you elaborate a little bit more on that statement?

**Ms McLean:** Access Canberra is the regulatory body and has responsibility for incorporated associations. When an association establishes and sets up their rules or their constitution, Access Canberra is responsible for checking those rules and holding onto them. Organisations have to lodge them with Access Canberra. If they change their rules, they have to go to Access Canberra. It is all very much a paper based system. Associations have to take in a hard copy, lodge it in person and pay the fee. This is one example. For volunteer-run organisations, volunteers are time-poor and, in the world we live in where most things are online, it would seem a simple way to help save organisations and volunteers time if a lot of these systems were online. They

could put their updated constitution online and pay the fee online, rather than taking time out of their day, going to the shopfront, lining up and going through that process. That is one example regarding Access Canberra.

Also, they are very paper based. They do not use emails; they send out letters. Again, in terms of timing and reaching the right people, we feel it would be a lot more efficient if they moved to email and a more online electronic service delivery model.

**Ms Elliott:** To add to that, often the forms need to be printed out, completed and submitted. Most other regulatory type bodies would have online forms available that can be simply submitted from a webpage, for example. The secondary point that I would add is that a lot of the information that is available online from Access Canberra does not help people comply with their regulations; it simply states what the regulations are. Volunteers are often left to figure out what is actually required or what might meet the acceptable standard.

**THE CHAIR:** The system for submitting your constitution through to the government seems to be a bit prehistoric. The point that you are making is quite clear. I will go to Miss Nuttall for a substantive and then I will go to Ms Orr.

**MISS NUTTALL:** To briefly clarify, if that is okay: every P&C in Canberra would have to individually print and submit their constitutions to Access Canberra rather than through you as a peak body?

**Ms McLean:** Yes; that is correct.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Wow.

**Ms McLean:** They are the regulatory body, whereas we are the peak body.

**Ms Elliott:** The only exception to that would be where an association is also registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, because some data sharing happens between the ACNC and Access Canberra.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Thank you. I have a substantive. In your submission, you mention the positive relationship that goes both ways between P&C volunteers and the school community. Would you be able to elaborate a little bit on that and give some examples of that positive relationship?

**Ms Elliott:** Julie, would you like to answer this or would you like me to?

**Ms McLean:** You can, Veronica.

**Ms Elliott:** P&Cs are the cornerstones of our school communities. They provide families with a less intimidating point of access to the school. That is really important. Parents coming to schools often bring with them their own experience of what education was like. If you think back—for some of us it is a bit longer—we may have had a more compliance based model of schooling. People tend to be intimidated by school staff and school principals. P&Cs provide a friendly and alternative method of creating relationships between families and the school staff.

**MS ORR:** I want to change topics a little bit. You note in your submission that you would welcome the ACT government developing a strategy to boost parent volunteer numbers in schools and raising the profile of volunteering and the benefits that it brings. The ACT government has an ACT volunteering strategy. A new 10-year strategy is currently being finalised. Do you see a role for P&Cs and parent volunteers in that strategy, and what would you see as the key criteria or factors?

**Ms Elliott:** It is important to note that we have heard that a volunteer strategy is being developed, but unfortunately we have not had the opportunity to engage in the development of that strategy, so I cannot comment on what that might look like at this point in time. It is really important that we do have a strategy to support volunteering in ACT public schools. All the people who volunteer through their P&Cs regularly say that it has really helped them understand the school system. It has helped them participate and understand what their children are learning in school, and we know that type of parent engagement is critical in supporting student outcomes.

The other reason it is really important is that our volunteers add to what the school community is able to do on its own. That is critical to give a rich and full community experience. Most of our families at the moment are highlighting a need to connect with people within their local communities. They feel very disconnected, mainly as a result of the pandemic.

**MS ORR:** To clarify that, I appreciate you saying that you are aware of the strategy being developed and you have not been included. Would the broader volunteering strategy suffice for what you are reflecting in your submission or do you see the need for a standalone volunteering approach for P&Cs?

**Ms Elliott:** Given the uniqueness of the education space and the way that P&Cs work in school communities, and because we often have families for quite a long time in a schooling journey, it probably would be helpful to have a specific strategy around P&Cs.

**MS ORR:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like to ask another question?

**MS ORR:** I have another question, but I am happy for Laura to jump in while I pick my next question.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I have a supplementary, if that is okay. You talk about a strategy and a public information campaign to make people aware of their P&Cs and to incentivise participation. Do you have a view as to what that would look like if we did it effectively? Is it about reaching out through social media channels? Is it about notes sent home with kids? Tangibly, what do you think that would look like if we did it well?

**Ms Elliott:** One of the best ways we have found to promote volunteering is to be really deliberate and purposeful about telling the stories of volunteering and sharing why people volunteer and the benefits of volunteering. Most of our volunteers

highlight what a great experience it is, how it has helped them make new friends within their local community and helped their children make new friends, and that they really look forward to volunteering; however, they find it difficult, given the pressures of life and the busyness of life at the moment. One thing to note around that is that, through an equity lens, there are some inconsistencies across the ACT in that not everyone can afford to take time out of the workforce to volunteer. We see that there is more volunteering happening in the more privileged areas of our society. That furthers the equity problems that we have across the school system.

**MS ORR:** My substantive is almost a supplementary to that. I am going to ask about the idea of leave for volunteering, because there is some provision in the current EA for leave. It is set at three days, if my memory serves me correctly, but please forgive me if I have that wrong. I want to get a better indication from you. You point out having smaller blocks of time for volunteering and having opportunities for sustained volunteering. What do you have in mind for leave? Are you aware of the current provisions, and how do you see those working or not working?

**Ms Elliott:** We are not specifically aware of the provisions in the current enterprise agreement, but, realistically, we would support anything that supports people volunteering and recognises the importance of volunteering in our communities. Across the ACT, we have a lot of P&Cs that have committees of three, four, five or six people who meet twice a term every term, and sometimes more, and that is just to maintain their organisation. That does not include the running of events and other things to comply with regulatory obligations, depending on the services that the P&Cs provide. It is really important that the government shows other employers how important volunteering is by leading the way and saying, “This is how we will support our staff to support their communities.”

**Ms McLean:** I could add to that as well. We are not exactly sure how the leave currently operates, but flexibility is key from our perspective. Parents might want to volunteer by, for example, reading in a classroom for an hour per week before work. Having flexibility to take an hour as volunteering leave every week rather than doing a volunteer day would be beneficial because parents, when they volunteer in school, often do it in small blocks. It would be good to have the flexibility to do small blocks of time rather than just one big block and having that recognised by employers.

**MISS NUTTALL:** You have talked a lot about the time constraints on P&C volunteers. How is this exacerbated by a potential lack of recognition from employers? Is it that people would really like to volunteer but there is a lack of recognition from employers, whether that is the ACT government or private or community employers?

**Ms Elliott:** Mostly, we find that people do not feel able to take time out of the workplace to volunteer. That is one of the barriers that they identify: they cannot step away from their job or family and caring commitments to engage more in the volunteer space. It is a real challenge. At the moment, many businesses are themselves very mindful of the financial situation that they are in, so that is also playing a part.

**MS ORR:** I have a quick question on the experience of your volunteers. You have a

group of parents and citizens; it is not just parents. Do you find the majority of your volunteers do tend to be parents, though, or do elusive citizens also turn up?

**Ms Elliott:** We definitely have citizens as well, but they would be outnumbered by parents.

**MS ORR:** Is it fair to say that the people volunteering for you are people with younger families, for the most part, with full-time work commitments? I am trying to get a feel for the demographics and the challenges they might have, based on that.

**Ms Elliott:** That is a really interesting question. Do you want to answer that, Julie?

**Ms McLean:** I will try. The demographic volunteering for P&Cs is predominantly women. We find that about 80 per cent of volunteers for P&Cs are women. That probably reflects women historically taking on more responsibility in parenting roles and interacting with the school. They are often women and they often have work commitments and family commitments that stop them from volunteering more. We did a survey and found that nearly half of our respondents would like to volunteer more if they could but work and family commitments stopped them.

**MS ORR:** Thank you.

**Ms Elliott:** I could add to that answer to give you a bit more insight into the role that gender plays. From our observation, women often take some time out with maternity leave and that sometimes opens the volunteering window, or they may work in a part-time role, which gives them the opportunity to participate through volunteering. That is not to say that all women do that. There are definitely women in P&Cs who work full time as well and juggle both of those things, but we find that women predominantly take a greater share of that load in addition to the duties that they have.

**MS ORR:** Chair, could you indulge me for the minute we have left. Regarding the activities of P&Cs, how much happens within school hours and how much happens outside of school hours? Outside of work hours is probably a better question. You have your regular meetings and then there are the activities and reading time. I want to get an idea of the breakdown.

**Ms Elliott:** It is really hard to say because P&Cs arrange their service profile and delivery of community engagement depending on their local needs. Some communities might do that more during the day. However, we have found that more and more families have two parents involved in the workforce. Outside of those hours tends to be most common for meeting times—in the evenings or around the edges of the workday and between caring for family.

**THE CHAIR:** That has brought us to the end of this session. I thank Ms Elliott and Ms McLean for appearing today on behalf of the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations. You will be sent a transcript, so feel free to go over that and provide any amendments, if need be. No questions were taken on notice, so I do not need to go through that section. On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing today.

**RENNICK, MR MICHAEL**, Director, People and Culture, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn

**CAMPBELL, MS BRITTANY**, Volunteer Services Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn

**PULLEN, MS TARA**, Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners

**MANCE, MS PAULA**, Executive Director, SEE Change

**DI MEZZA, MS SONIA**, Chief Executive Officer, Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to this session of the public hearings today. We have quite a few witnesses appearing at the panel. We have SEE Change, St Vincent de Paul Canberra/Goulburn, Migrant and Refugee Settlements Services and the Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners. Welcome today. I would like to draw your attention to the privileges and obligations that would have been sent through to you all and draw your attention to that. Could you state your agreement to the privilege statement?

**Mr Rennick:** Yes, I agree to the privilege statement.

**Ms Campbell:** Yes, I do agree with the privilege statement.

**Ms Pullen:** Yes, I agree to the privilege statement.

**Ms Mance:** Yes, I agree to the privilege statement.

**Ms Di Mezza:** I also agree to the privilege statement.

**THE CHAIR:** We have 35 minutes for this session. We could go to brief opening statements, though we do have five of you. I could time you on a 60-second statement if you like. Or we can just go straight to questions. What would you like to do?

**MS ORR:** Maybe if there is just one thing that you want to put on the record, we could highlight that quickly first and then—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, if anyone would like to make a statement first, or would you like to go straight to questions? Everyone is happy! Do you want to make a statement?

**Ms Mance:** The letter we got said that there was to be no opening statement, so we are fine.

**THE CHAIR:** I am being generous!

**Ms Mance:** That is very nice. That is kind of you. I think we can go to questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. My first one is directed to the Rotary submission. You mentioned there a suggestion that volunteering is decreasing amongst our younger generation. Has this been the case for your organisation?

**Ms Pullen:** Yes. The Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners is a little bit unique in the ACT in that we are a younger club, demographically, as a rule, but we do find that the number of volunteers in Rotary is decreasing at quite a staggering rate. Across our

district, which covers more than just the Australian Capital Territory, we have lost more than a thousand members in the last 12 to 24 months. That is due to a number of things; people moving out of the area and unfortunately people passing away, and therefore the membership of clubs is declining across that area.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned 1,000: is that 1,000 registered participants who come along to Rotary?

**Ms Pullen:** That is paying members. As a Rotary club, we pay to be a part of the club and the organisation and to be able to call ourselves Rotarians, and then we volunteer under the banner of Rotary. We have lost a thousand members collectively over quite a large geographical area.

**THE CHAIR:** Of course, that is from all ages, right?

**Ms Pullen:** Yes, but we are finding the majority of our members across most of Rotary, and particularly the 15 clubs that we referenced in the ACT, are retirees and older members. We are working to encourage and promote Rotary to younger members in the community to try and get them involved.

**THE CHAIR:** What sort of programs are you running, or marketing, or how are you reaching the younger generation?

**Ms Pullen:** We do a lot of work with social media, so we have quite an active Facebook page, Instagram account, and we are looking at other ways that we can promote the work that we do. We reach out through local radio on a regular basis as well for activities coming up. An example would be with our recent birthing kits packing event, which benefits primarily people internationally as these packs get sent to low resource areas around the world to assist women to give birth safely. We did a lot of promotion over Facebook, Instagram, social media and emails, and we managed to bring in about 150 volunteers from around the ACT community for a single day to pack the 3,000 kits that we packed.

**THE CHAIR:** What sort of impact does this have on your organisation in terms of running projects, having so many people step away?

**Ms Pullen:** It can then be harder to get the volunteers that we need for the projects that we would like to run. We do find we might put a call out or receive a request from other organisations—we provide a lot of assistance to other organisations in the ACT—and we will get a request out, but due to numbers and if people are unavailable, have family obligations, illnesses, et cetera, or actually those declining numbers, there are times when we have to say, “Unfortunately, we cannot provide that additional assistance.” The Sundowners are very much wanting to have a very hands-on approach. We will often offer assistance where we can to other organisations because we have the manpower to do it, but there are times that we have to say, “Unfortunately, we cannot help.”

**THE CHAIR:** Have you looked at some of the reasons why people have dropped off, or do you send out a survey to those past members and seek feedback?



**Ms Pullen:** Of the number of members that have left over the last 12 months from our club specifically, I have met with or spoken to a few of them to get their reasons. Some have been for family obligations or changes in circumstances that have meant they are not able to continue attending and participating. Rotary does more broadly do surveys on an annual basis to gauge people's level of satisfaction within Rotary and the reasons why they come along and stay.

I do have a couple of the stats. It is available online as well. Some of the main reasons why people join Rotary are things like: to complete local service; to build friendships; to develop professional connections; and to develop their leadership skills. If people find they are not being engaged in those things, they then become some of the reasons why they are saying, "Well, I am going to step away because I am not getting what I wanted out of this."

**MS ORR:** Can I just check that you said it was 1,000 people for the region? The ACT region takes in a bit of New South Wales too—it is quite big.

**Ms Pullen:** The Canberra Sundowners fall into what is called Rotary district 9705, which covers a large geographical area. I am going to get it wrong, so I can always provide it on notice as well, but we have clubs that go from as far up as Forbes; out towards Leeton; down towards the Sapphire Coast, Merimbula River and Batemans Bay; and up into the Southern Highlands.

**MS ORR:** Yes. I do not need a long list. I just wanted to make sure I could contextualise it.

**Ms Pullen:** Yes, it is quite a large area.

**MS ORR:** I am picking up on the birthing kit line of inquiry. You mentioned you had 150 people come just for the day. Did you get feedback from those people? Were they people who are existing club members? Were they people who are in addition to club members? Were they coming because it was just a day and they did not have to make a longer term, ongoing commitment? Because that is quite a successful event, can we get a bit of indication on how that one came about?

**Ms Pullen:** This has been an annual activity that we have been running before we formally started, and we initially started with just our club members getting together and packing. I think the first packing day was about 500 kits. It was not many at all, and we have just continued to stretch the goal every single year.

We have not surveyed the people that came along to volunteer on that day in May when we were packing the birthing kits. There was a large contingent of our membership. I would have to double-check the exact numbers, but we probably had about two-thirds of our club and the rest were volunteers. One hundred and thirty volunteers, members of the local community and a number of MLAs also attended. It was great to see. We also had, in partnership with another organisation we support—they brought along their mentors and mentees who were participating in one of their programs. So there was probably about 15 mentors and their mentees there. The feedback we got from one of them, which I think we listed in the submission, was that they felt a little bit like a superhero, or a hero, knowing they were providing that

really good service.

**MS ORR:** St Vincent de Paul, you talk about formal and informal volunteering. Can you run us through a little bit more about those definitions and the role that difference plays in volunteering and organising volunteering activities?

**Ms Campbell:** I think within our organisation, it is more formal volunteering; noting that the work we do, insurance purposes, governance, along with our commitment to child safety, and noting that we are a not-for-profit, Catholic lay organisation. In saying that, though, informal volunteering is time given and commitment given by individuals without that ongoing volunteering commitment thereafter.

**MS ORR:** So it is like that 130 people who turned up to the packing day, as opposed to the members.

**Ms Campbell:** Yes. A little bit. So whilst that is, in a sense, still somewhat formal, it could potentially be volunteering for your child's football club or assisting with a school fete type thing. So sometimes whilst that is formal, it could still be informal, in the way that it is not ongoing. It could be a shorter application form; it could be less credentialling. In a sense, corporate volunteering, for us, would probably be a very informal way of volunteering, despite the fact there are still applications and paperwork they need to complete.

**MS ORR:** And that is because it is not on an ongoing basis?

**Ms Campbell:** Yes.

**MS ORR:** So that tends to be the qualifier. If it is ongoing, it is more formal than informal.

**Ms Campbell:** Yes. Years ago, I know that informal volunteering was considered kinship care and all sorts of other things too, where people were giving their time and they were tied to commitments, but it was for personal reasons or family reasons, and that did not necessarily fall under the formal version of volunteering.

**MS ORR:** So going to the second part of that question, with the formal and the informal, how does this actually affect volunteering projects? If one is ongoing and one is not ongoing, as an organisation that is relying on a lot of volunteer power, how does that impact you?

**Mr Rennick:** If I may. Vinnies is definitely more in the formal volunteering. I think how I would explain that is this: the feedback that we have seen over the last couple of years, and a lot of the decline in volunteer numbers, is because people have less time to commit, and they are looking for more informal options. So that has been Vinnies experience. Our experience is definitely of the more formal type, and some of the people that are leaving are saying that they are looking for a more informal option.

**MS ORR:** So I guess it begs the question then, if people are looking for more informal volunteering—and I think that is probably a little bit consistent with what we have heard from the other witnesses this morning that people are time-poor and they

still want to contribute but cannot do it on an ongoing basis—how, as an organisation, do you then adapt your programs to meet what people are able to offer? Knowing that that also gives you a level of uncertainty, because it is informal; it is not ongoing.

**Mr Rennick:** The short answer is replacing volunteer hours with paid employment hours, because the need we have within our organisation—we just require a lot more administration and coordination. So that would be our experience.

**MS ORR:** I am not quite sure how to phrase this without it sounding a bit harsh, but it is not intended to be harsh. Have you not had a look at your programs and then said, “Could we not adapt these to a more informal volunteer base?” If the decision has been “No. We cannot do that. We have to replace it with paid hours,” what have been the determinants of that outcome?

**Mr Rennick:** Most of our programs would require more formal—there is little opportunity. In our Vinnies, it is something that we are still continuing to explore, and something that we would like to be able to take greater advantage of, that informal volunteering, but it is not something—

**MS ORR:** Is it down to the reliability and knowing that you can provide things on an ongoing basis? The not knowing how many volunteers are going to be able to turn up?

**Mr Rennick:** In some of those programs, yes. If we have made commitments to clients or companions who would be accessing those programs, then reliability, certainly, is one of those.

**Ms Campbell:** Can I just extend on that too, please, if possible? I think the other thing is that it is the training and the onboarding as well. It is the learning. So for a volunteer or for an individual to enjoy what it is they are doing, they need to have a sound understanding of the task at hand. Sometimes it can be quite frustrating or a bit of a deterrent if you are going to do one volunteer shift for three hours, but then you are not going back again for another month, which virtually means every time you are there, you are relearning what it was that you were doing previously. We see volunteers then leave because they say, “It is too hard,” or “I am not understanding,” when all they are wanting to do is give their time. So it is not just the reliability of programs and services; it is also the value that the individual gets from giving their time as well.

**MS ORR:** I do not know if anyone else wants to add anything to those questions, from their experiences?

**THE CHAIR:** Out of the witnesses?

**MS ORR:** Yes, anyone; you are all welcome to jump in.

**Ms Mance:** It is quite a different picture at SEE Change with respect to volunteering—and that is that we are actually turning away volunteers. In terms of our volunteer base, our organisation has grown 300 per cent in the last 12 months to about 160 ongoing volunteers. But our problem is that our operational funding is so small. We are sitting on about 0.9 of an FTE funded by the ACT government at the moment

to support an absolutely enormous network, if you look at the relationship between funding and volunteer hours sitting at about 500 hours a month. Only this morning, I turned away some students. We are turning away volunteers regularly now, on a weekly basis, because we have no ethical way of supporting them.

Some of the issues that were raised by St Vincent's around training and support are definitely very real for our organisation—and also to emphasise the ethical support. If somebody turns up, it might be the only time they have put their foot in the water for volunteering and you want them to have a good experience so that they come back. If those supports do not exist because of a lack of funding, that person might never volunteer again. That is a lost opportunity for unpaid work but also a lost opportunity for social inclusion and for addressing loneliness and all the other benefits that come with volunteering for both the volunteer and the organisation.

**MS ORR:** Are the people coming forward to SEE Change to volunteer better characterised as looking for informal, just a bit here and there, volunteering opportunities or are they looking for more regular ongoing?

**Ms Mance:** I think it varies, depending on which group SEE Change works through. At the moment we have about 17 volunteer groups within our organisation, and they have different focuses. If the group was focused on doing parkland regeneration, people would turn up on a regular basis until that project was finished. If it was a repair café—and we have three of those and we are also involved in three additional ones—it would be that they were turning up once a month, month on month. So they would book out their personal diary for the whole year: “I have got to turn up on the last Sunday and make my volunteer contribution for either admin or repairing.” It is mixed.

**MISS NUTTALL:** To everyone here at the panel: do you feel like your organisation is achieving economy of scale with the funding that you have, either from the government or self-sustaining, to support your volunteers right now and have you ever had that economy of scale?

**Ms Di Mezza:** I think we are always chasing the funds, are we not? We always welcome more funds. I completely agree with Paula in terms of ethical support of volunteers. People sometimes think it is just free work and you do not have to pay for it. But there is a lot that the organisation, I believe, must do to properly support volunteers. That comes from the infrastructure of the organisation—not just training but also being really clear about what you want the volunteer to do and for them to be clear and to feel that they are learning. It has got to be quid pro quo—not just that we are taking from volunteers but that volunteers are getting an experience, and they are learning and getting something good and positive out of it. I think we are always trying to chase economies of scale and make that work. It is always an ongoing issue. But you do need proper infrastructure to support engaging volunteers.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Does anyone else want to add anything?

**Ms Pullen:** I might just add something. For Rotary, as an organisation, to be able to participate and undertake the activities we do we need to raise our own funds. We have a really good relationship with one of the local Bunnings, where we are able to

get a regular barbecue and we do a lot of fundraising there. We have also been able to run and put a lot of hours into other activities that we run for fundraising. For example, last year, we ran a trivia night, which helped us to get halfway towards the \$15,000 we needed to raise to be able to pack these birthing kits in May. A lot of time is given by our members not just on the day to pack the kits but also in the months beforehand to raise the funds that we need and to promote the project. We would not be able to necessarily count the hours of additional volunteer work that we put in outside of the kind of structured specific days that we have organised. But the benefit of that for us is knowing that we are doing good in the world. The Rotary motto is “service above self” and we very much live that motto in our lives.

**Ms Campbell:** I would also like to give an answer, too, please. Unpaid work is a collective group of lots of individuals for different reasons. If you look at the definition of volunteering, it is meant to be time willingly given without financial gain. In saying that, though, there is JobSeeker, there is Work for the Dole and, pending organisational set-up and structure, there are some organisations that will not dabble or delve in that at all or generally it is incorporated within the volunteering program because it is unpaid work, it is not employment and there are no employee contracts.

When you look at that cohort, in particular, they are already disadvantaged and are already facing some form of financial hardship. The latest volunteering report has come out. It states that volunteers are generally \$12.76 per hour of voluntary work out of pocket. Reimbursements do not necessarily happen. I think 26 per cent of the total out-of-pocket expenses are reimbursed for volunteers. There needs to be something in the way of funding put in to be able to support individuals to volunteer and for it not to be an added stress or pressure on them.

If you look at an organisation like Vinnies, in which we receive some government funding, a lot of it is less than what it used to be to see programs run. There is an increasing need within community as well. Therefore, when you look at funding as a collective and you look at the groups of people that we are working with, yes, there needs to be funding injected, whether that is organisationally or across government, to support the individuals that are volunteering to be able to do so. That is my piece of advice.

**Ms Mance:** I would like to make an additional point on the demographics of volunteering due to, I guess, a lack of funding or support. I know for SEE Change, it means that we generally support volunteers that are very self-sufficient—so an older cohort. We are often asked, “Can you support younger volunteers?” That would be fantastic and aspirational, but we actually cannot because the more inexperienced, the younger or the more vulnerable the volunteer, the higher level of support that is required. So, much to my disappointment, we do tend to support volunteers that are older and more self-sufficient—sort of semi-retired. There are a few young women. It was mentioned before about women working part-time. There are leaders in our organisation of that demographic, but generally they are semi-retired or retired individuals.

**MS ORR:** We have organisations such as VolunteeringACT, which flows into Volunteering Australia, who are sort of there to act as a bit of peak and provide support. Given that you are all organisations who have volunteer cohorts, I am

interested to know what sort of relationship you have with those sorts of peak groups who can provide the support? This goes to some of the issues that you have been talking about. I am interested to hear that and where you might see some area for improvement.

**Ms Campbell:** SEE Change is a member of VolunteeringACT. We had to use donated funds to pay for the membership. We have no training budget, so we cannot really access the training and support that they offer. We feel it is important to be a member of VolunteeringACT, but we find it difficult to engage with the services that they offer, purely through lack of resources.

**MS ORR:** Are there any other groups you can go to?

**Ms Campbell:** VolunteeringACT provide best practice. They are great in the way of being able to pick up the phone, connecting with someone and having a conversation. They advocate on behalf of all volunteering involved organisations. I think the thing is that they themselves may potentially require more funding and resources to be able to deliver the services that would benefit everybody within community. Even outside of us being here, you have got parishes and community groups that probably do not even know that there is a peak body of volunteering within the ACT that are running community pantries and all sorts of things on a Sunday after church service. There are so many little groups and community groups that are missing out on that because they do not have the dollars or the funding or because they are not necessarily connected with mail distribution lists and all sorts of things.

We have high membership, noting that we have just under 2,000 volunteers and members across our region. We have tapped into their free legal service and advice as well. So, for us, noting that we have got the money, or we have chosen to invest our money into that, it is beneficial for us and it has been extremely helpful. There are different states as well and you go into different jurisdictions and legislation. Ideally, at some point in time too, Volunteering Australia will have the ability to work with all peak bodies of different states to actually come up with consistent processes across the nation, because that actually makes for a better volunteer experience as well.

**Mr Rennick:** If I may expand on that? In short I would say that we at Vinnies have got a great relationship with VolunteeringACT. I acknowledge Paula's comment that, for some of the services that we have to access, we have to pay for. They have to manage their resources and requirements as well. It may be something that could be of support to all of us if those peak bodies were provided more support or benefits so that they could provide more cost-effective or affordable resources to member organisations. But certainly our experience, I think, is very good.

In terms of what more they could do, I think they are doing very well. I think the size of the challenge that we are facing with volunteering right across Australia at the moment is that great that it would be difficult to expect that VolunteeringACT or Volunteering Australia were going to—

**MS ORR:** When you say the “size of the challenge”, is this around those issues we have gone to previously like people are time poor and not volunteering as much or, for various other reasons, are just not getting involved?

**Mr Rennick:** Yes.

**MS ORR:** Did you have something?

**Ms Pullen:** I was just going to say that Rotary is a member of a district and there is a support structure that we can call on within that district. More broadly, with Rotary International, through the membership fees that we pay, we have access to a number of learning, development and training areas but also access to specialists who can assist with various areas that we might want to focus on. Last year we called on some assistance from a specialist who is very good with grant writing and applications. Through that, we were successful in getting two separate grants, one through Rotary itself, where we were able to provide two defibrillators for a local organisation, Community Services # 1, and the other one was actually through Australia Post, where we were able to train up to 50 people in mental health first aid in the last 12 months.

**MS ORR:** So you are not relying on that being done externally—

**Ms Pullen:** No.

**MS ORR:** It is done in-house.

**Ms Pullen:** We have a lot more of the internal structures. It does not mean that we cannot reach out. We do have corporate members that we work with as well. They provide additional support in terms of expanding our other skill sets that maybe Rotary does not focus on in the volunteering aspect and that community service aspect. But, otherwise, we are quite internal in some of those things that we do.

**Mrs Di Mezza:** We are connected to VolunteeringACT too. They have reached out and we have met up with them. Getting some guidance on policies and procedures for managing volunteers has been helpful.

**MS ORR:** So it is really providing that education resource. While we are talking about support for you as an organisation, we have the ACT volunteering strategy, and I am interested to know what input you have been able to have into that and any observations you might have into the development of that new strategy. Given that we have heard a lot of issues are coming to a head, I am just trying to get a feel for how these are being fed back into the process.

**Ms Campbell:** I am a part of the Volunteer Strategic Advisory Group. I think that is the correct terminology. We had a very big part in consultation and discussions. Furthermore, I was a community representative of the ACT government directorate kind of meeting that happened a couple of months ago as well. That was quite interesting. I know from that that there were some changes made to the strategy. But I do not really know where consultation was with others on this panel.

**Miss Pullen:** We have not provided any feedback into it.

**MS ORR:** When you say “we”?

**Miss Pullen:** We, as in my Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners. I cannot speak for any of the other clubs.

**Ms Mance:** We did not provide any input. My experience is that, in the environment sector, possibly the organisations are not members of VolunteeringACT.

**Ms Campbell:** That is no reflection on VolunteeringACT; that is just—

**MS ORR:** Because you have to opt in to being a member.

**Ms Campbell:** Yes. They just do not have the resources, either financial or time, to participate. So perhaps it could be a little bit slanted towards the larger organisations.

**Mrs Di Mezza:** I have been aware of it, but I have been the CEO for only a short time.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Mance, you mentioned in your submission that you would like to ensure adequate public liability and other insurances are in place and that appropriate policies and procedures meet modern workplace and organisational standards, such as work, health and safety. I suspect that this would impact all organisations here. I have pretty much opened up this question. We might start with you, Ms Mance. Could you talk a little bit to that?

**Ms Mance:** I am sounding a bit repetitive because I keep on saying it is just a lack of resources. We do the best we can. We do have insurances. But, as you would be aware, insurance premiums are growing exponentially. It takes about 10 per cent of our funding just to cover the insurance. Ensuring that 160 volunteers are meeting the eligibility criteria for insurance is a challenge. We decree that they have to be members of SEE Change to be covered by insurance, which is just \$10. So it is not a revenue-raising thing; it is an eligibility thing. We do not provide any training at all to our staff. At our office at Dickson, you have to go outside to the bathroom. There are things like that that I think are below what contemporary expectations are of what workplaces provide. I do not think I can add anything more to that without sounding like I am being a bit repetitive about funding.

**THE CHAIR:** Would anyone else like to add a comment?

**Mrs Di Mezza:** Yes. As we know, volunteers need to be covered by insurance. I agree with Paula that it is really, really expensive and premiums keep growing. It is another big expense that we have to cover but we must cover to make sure everyone is properly supported and covered.

**THE CHAIR:** Anyone else?

**Mr Rennick:** I think that that is a factor in the changing composition of our workforce. Even in the last five years, we would have doubled the number of paid employees that we have, which changes up that ratio of unpaid work to paid work. There is certainly an aspect of that that is driven by the demand for additional administration, compliance and risk management across all those areas and also being able to pay for it—being able to generate the revenue or the funds to be able to pay for



it too.

**Ms Campbell:** I think sometimes with voluntary insurance, it is always less than employee kind of insurance and coverage as well. I think it is really important to note that the coverage is not the same with the insurance unless you get an overarching one that covers everybody. But, generally, organisations will do paid workforce employees and then they will get voluntary insurance to the side.

**MS ORR:** How do you differentiate and what things do you have in place to say that that is a volunteer role and that is a paid work role? I look at Vinnies just because you have such a broad example of both.

**Mr Rennick:** I think that that is something that has changed and evolved over time. Again, there was a time where a lot more roles would have been more volunteer simply because we were a near exclusive volunteer organisation for the majority of our history. I think it is similar to what we were talking about before with informal to formal volunteering. It comes back to what the expectations are of a role. I think the volunteer standard provides that 16 hours a week is the maximum that a volunteer should provide. Where we would expect a role would need a regular commitment of 16 hours a week, where it can involve a level of expertise that a person needs to bring to a role that might not be suitable for a volunteer, who might be skilled in their professional capacity but might be just looking for a volunteer role, that is where we make that distinction. But that has changed and evolved over time. More and more now we are looking at roles with any level of responsibility would have to fall into more paid employment.

**Ms Campbell:** Volunteers are meant to be a value-add to any program or service. When you look at core functionality and roles to business and to ensure that we are providing that to the community, they are now paid roles and/or moving more to paid roles.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee, we would like to thank you all for appearing today and also for your submission. You will be provided a transcript of this morning's hearing. Feel free to go over it and make any amendments. I am sure it is quite accurate. Hansard does an amazing job. On behalf of the committee, thank you for attending.

**Short suspension.**

**McENCROE, MRS DOREEN ESM**, President, ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association

**DOWLING, MR JOHN**, Treasurer, ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome to this morning's Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality inquiry into unpaid work. You would have received the pink privilege statement. There is one in front of you. Have you had a chance to look at that briefly, and do you agree to the conditions of that pink privilege statement?

**Mr Dowling:** Certainly.

**Mrs McEncroe:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. Please be aware that today's proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast to a cast of thousands today!

**Mrs McEncroe:** That is what we need.

**THE CHAIR:** We have 20 minutes for you today. I could go straight to questions or you could make a brief opening statement.

**Mr Dowling:** We are happy to just take questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. I am interested in your recommendation 6, on page 10: "providing presumptive compensation in respect of PTSD for volunteer first responders". Would you be able to comment a little bit more on that?

**Mr Dowling:** Something that was mentioned in the ACT RFS submission was that we have some interaction with the VBA, the Volunteer Brigades Association. We would certainly support that argument. They have done some quite significant work around that area. As I said, we had not noticed any particular PTSD issues in the SES at that time, and we are not aware of anybody with that particular issue, although there was one member of the SES—they were a member of Pialligo—but his PTSD was a result of war service in Afghanistan and the Middle East, I believe.

It is an issue for the RFS. It may, at some stage, become an issue for the SES, particularly regarding the nature of some of the work that we do with the police, such as searching for missing people and finding them, and sometimes finding them in a deceased form. There have been a number of times when ACT SES members have had to do that, including—and I will be blunt—having to cut someone down who had taken their life. They rely on the SES. The police, when we need to get people down in that sort of circumstance, say, "We will let you do that."

**THE CHAIR:** Nothing can really train you for such a situation.

**Mr Dowling:** No; you cannot train people. The SES makes sure that people are aware of all the services that are available to them. In the first instance, they have colleagues

to talk to. They have peer support, which is well managed in the ESA, and the SES peer support group is quite well trained. They also have access to chaplains. The three chaplains in ESA are well respected. And there are the outreach services that are available through government.

**MS ORR:** I have a supplementary to that. Regarding the recommendation to presumptive compensation in respect of PTSD, is it fair to categorise it as not currently needed but it would be good to have it there if it were ever needed?

**Mr Dowling:** Certainly. I do not know when such services might be needed. It is particularly in relation to individuals and how they cope with a particular stress.

**MS ORR:** I want to read through your submission. It is quite detailed. There is quite a lot in there. I think it is fair to say that the SES, as a volunteer group, has very particular needs based on the work that it does. The ACT government has a volunteering strategy and is working on revising it or refreshing it—however you want to say it. Has the SES had any input into that strategy? Do you feel the needs of the SES are being reflected?

**Mr Dowling:** I have not heard. Certainly, if it is being done through ESA, through the—

**MS ORR:** I think it sits with a different directorate, but this partly goes to my question about where the outreach program is.

**Mr Dowling:** If I were honest, I am not sure that the directorate necessarily understands volunteers, from my recent experience, in terms of how the JESC at Gungahlin was managed and how the exit of SES from that facility was managed. It was not particularly well managed, in my view. One of the things that I personally picked up is that there is a lack of understanding that they are dealing with volunteers and what that really means. Generally, dealing with the volunteers is done through the ESA and the chief officer. When it goes outside of that boundary, we have problems.

**MS ORR:** It is interesting. It is picking up on a theme we are starting to hear—a little bit in your submission but also from other witnesses: volunteering is a particular type of contribution and it has its own specific needs. Rather than going into detail and tit-for-tat on particular circumstances, I would be more interested to know where you think responses to volunteering and support for volunteering could be improved—more high-level future progress.

**Mr Dowling:** It is probably about having that understanding. When you are dealing with staff and you are in a public service relationship—and we part of the public service, and that seems—

**MS ORR:** It is quite unique.

**Mr Dowling:** The person working there says, “Do this,” or they might have some feedback. But, in terms of what the volunteers do, it is their time. Volunteering is all about time, and that is what is precious to volunteers. They want to make sure that the time that they spend is being used wisely, that their time is not being wasted and that

they are being consulted and listened to. That is the nut of what that volunteer charter is all about: it is a way of trying to get to some sort of understanding. It is about the application of the charter, but sometimes there are issues.

**MS ORR:** The charter is the SES charter with JACS? Where does the charter fit in?

**Ms McEncroe:** The charter was formed by the ACT government on what we are actually doing with the volunteers, and that includes the volunteers of the RFS, the SES, the Community Fire Units, MAPS—all of the volunteers under ESA.

**MS ORR:** Is it fair to say, from what you have alluded to so far, that perhaps the charter could be implemented? Is that a polite way to put it?

**Mr Dowling:** Yes. The charter is an agreement to consult and have some sort of interaction about how decisions are made, when they are made and the quality of the decisions. What is probably lacking is the procedure around that.

**MS ORR:** So there are some good intentions, but how it happens is unclear?

**Mr Dowling:** Yes.

**MS ORR:** I want to take a little step to the side, but it all fits within this. A few people have put to us that volunteering is essentially a value-add for the program but also for the person doing it. They want to have a good experience doing it, because it is about giving up their time. In what ways do you think, for the SES in particular, there could be improvement in supporting the volunteers for the time they are giving, and also making sure that they have everything they need? The SES, in particular, has a quite specific skill set that goes with it. What I am getting at is: how can we better improve that relationship, if you see anything lacking at the moment, so that people in the SES actually feel that they are supported and that they are appreciated for the time and the skills that they are giving?

**Mrs McEncroe:** From my point of view, a lot of people do not realise that you do not just join the SES. Once you are in, there is constant training, because you have to keep up your competencies so that you can get onto a roof and do different things.

**MS ORR:** Isn't it weekly training?

**Mrs McEncroe:** There is weekly training. There is more training on weekends as well, if necessary, and things like that. It goes on. The recruitment training that John has been doing with our new recruits takes absolutely weeks. It is extra time.

**Mr Dowling:** Yes. A recruitment program for new recruits—and we have new recruits at the moment—involves an IET process, which is initial employment training, which is very public service-ish in what it does, but it gives them the basic sign-off on what they need to do. Then they start training around the skill sets that they need to develop. At the moment, I and other trainers are training the recent intake. They are learning skills around how to do storm and water damage operations. That involves things like how to build sandbag walls, how to operate generators and lighting, how to divert water, climb on roofs and fix roofs, and do so safely within the

code of practice that we have to operate within. That all takes many months, because it happens on Tuesday nights for a couple of hours and on a weekend day, and then there is an assessment day. This year, in terms of not only that training but also other training, I have worked 140 hours. That is my volunteering time towards making sure that the new people are trained and current people are upskilled.

**MS ORR:** I am asking a lot of questions, so, Chair, cut me off when you want, because I have lots more. I will keep going if you do not.

**THE CHAIR:** Ask this one and then we will go to Miss Nuttall.

**MS ORR:** This is a bit of a personal question, Mr Dowling, if you do not mind. You just mentioned 140 hours. That is a big commitment. What drives you to make that commitment?

**Mr Dowling:** There are two things. One is that I am now retired. I am living the life of Riley on my public service pension, which is like gold, I could say, but I enjoy giving back to the community. I enjoy doing the training. If I did not enjoy it, I would not be doing it. That is, in part, the embodiment of a volunteer: they enjoy what they are doing. They have the time—and sometimes they do not have the time—to do that, and that is what they get out of it. They are not looking for money. They are not necessarily looking for pats on the back either. They get pats on the back every now and again, but that is just the icing on the cake. That is not something that is directly motivating people.

**Mrs McEncroe:** A lot of the training that we do is run by the volunteers. When you look at ESA training, they have a group of people. From what I understand, out of that group of people, we have one for the whole of the SES—and we have 350-odd volunteers et cetera—whereas the paid services have teams of trainers that train them. As John said in the submission, we are the poor cousins.

**MS ORR:** I have some more questions, but I will let Miss Nuttall have a go.

**THE CHAIR:** Miss Nuttall, on a substantive?

**MISS NUTTALL:** Yes, please. At the beginning of your submission, you mention a substantial increase—I think it was a 55 per cent increase—in assistance to the community against last year's high-risk weather season. Do you think that last year was an outlier or is that something we are going to see more often?

**Mr Dowling:** Nobody knows. This information was given to the commanders at a strategy meeting late last year. The highest number of requests for assistance was 991. That was the worst day. In 2023, the worst storm saw 3,891. That was the hailstorm and the consequences of that. Informally, over the last 25 years that I have been a member, it has seemed that the impact of storms has kept growing. That could be due in part to growth in the expanse of the ACT, because there are more people around the place, but, when storms come, they do tend to be a bit more fierce than we have experienced.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I have a quick follow-up, if that is okay. When you responded in

the last storm season, did you have the same level of funding as previous years or were you allocated extra support in recognition of the increase, as it started to intensify?

**Mr Dowling:** I think there was an increase. Those sorts of statistics are better asked of the agency because they keep track—or they try to keep track. Sometimes it is on spreadsheets because they lack the necessary systems to keep good oversight of it. It is a bit like recruitment. I think most of that is kept on spreadsheets at the moment, but they are trying to get a system that would keep track of the diverse nature of where they recruit from.

**Mrs McEncroe:** The volunteers do a lot of hours that are not recorded.

**Mr Dowling:** Yes. There are the admin hours.

**Mrs McEncroe:** I know from my own experience—I do a lot with the national body as well as the ACT body—that those times are not recorded. And I know that John does other stuff at home, and it is not recorded. We are not the only ones. That would be right across, especially in the management side of it—the commanders et cetera. They do a lot of work that is not recorded.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Do you mind me asking: why is it not recorded? Is it just that “it has to be done”?

**Mrs McEncroe:** We do have a time station that we can put our times into, but you have to have it there to do it. There is a possibility of doing it online, but I do not believe that is given to most people.

**Mr Dowling:** No.

**Mrs McEncroe:** So, as far as I am concerned, I just do not record it.

**Mr Dowling:** The time stations that people can get off the internet is utilised in the service to try to track people’s hours, but it really only records active hours, because you are logging in through the ACT government system and then logging out through the ACT government system.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. That brings us to the end of the today’s public hearing with the ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association. A transcript will be provided by Hansard, so please go over that and make any amendments that you need to. No questions were taken on notice, so, on behalf of the committee, thank you for your submission and for appearing today.

**Mrs McEncroe:** Thank you very much for the opportunity.

**Short suspension.**

**GEOFFROY, MISS TAYLOR**, President, University of Canberra Psychology Society

**KAGUCIA, MISS ANGELA**, Treasurer, UC Student Representative Council

**AHMED, MS MUSHTAHA**, President, UC Student Representative Council

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome to today's public hearing. We have in front of us representatives from the University of Canberra's Student Representative Council and Psychology Society. On behalf of our committee, welcome. You will have in front of you our privilege statement. I remind you of your obligations and the protections afforded by parliamentary privilege. Do you agree to that privilege statement?

**Miss Geoffroy:** I agree to the privilege statement.

**Miss Kagucia:** I agree to the privilege statement.

**Ms Ahmed:** I have read and I understand the statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Do you have any opening comments that you would like to make before we go to questions or are you happy for us to start questions?

**Ms Ahmed:** We would be happy to give a quick opening statement. First of all, the student council at UC appreciates that the committee has included unpaid placements and internships as terms of reference in this inquiry. As we mentioned in our submission, we acknowledge that placements, internships and volunteering are very important components of our society in Canberra, but there should be more support for students who are undertaking these experiences. The support provided by the ACT government and the federal government does not fully address all current issues. Angela will give a quick summary of the issues that we were able to identify.

**Miss Kagucia:** In our submission, we mentioned a few issues that the students are experiencing. We spoke about the financial sacrifices a student has to make, and these have led to food insecurity, housing instability and transportation challenges, as well as compromised health. The students are sometimes forced to skip meals to cut back on essential expenses and some even face the risk of homelessness due to the financial strain of unpaid work. The emotional strain is also quite significant. Students have mentioned experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety, as well as uncertainty about their academic and career paths. The demands of unpaid work often result in compromised study time, reduced academic performance and extended degree completion times. Family relationships also really suffer because they feel distant from their loved ones because of the extreme pressure of unpaid work. It is our plea that you hear the cry of students in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** Obviously, placement has an impact on students. You mentioned students travelling interstate. Could you elaborate a little bit more on the financial impact that might have and the sort of impact that might have on their studies as well.

**Ms Ahmed:** One thing we mentioned is the cost of transportation. Many students,

because there are not enough placement opportunities in the ACT, have to go interstate to find internship and placement opportunities. This means increased costs and it also means paying double rent, which is a really big crisis, especially during the current housing crisis.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there anything that you could recommend the government could do to help assist students, particularly students who might be going away on placement?

**Miss Geoffroy:** A lot of students who have to go away on placement are actually paying two forms of rent. A lot of our students obviously live on campus, and those payments are not paused for them to go away for placements. In some cases, they have to pay rent when they travel. Something that the government could look into is possible alternatives so that does not happen, whether that is a pause on their rent in Canberra while they are away or some way to subsidise the cost of living when they go on their placements.

**Miss Kagucia:** We also think a stipend would go a long way to ensuring that students are not having to cut back on essential expenses. Even with the measures that are being suggested by my colleagues, a stipend would go a long way because students are not able to work during the time they are on the internships and placements, so their source of income is compromised. They have no way to cover any of the costs that they have as they do their placements. A stipend would go a long way to easing some of these burdens.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Orr, on a substantive?

**MS ORR:** Yes. I want to get a better idea of what courses are impacted. The federal government has brought in placements for teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work students. We have identified that psychology students are one of the gaps in that. Are there other courses where placements are needed and would not be covered?

**Miss Geoffroy:** Every bachelor course has a placement. Most TAFE courses have placements as well. Pretty much every student who is not included on that list is affected. I believe it is standard to do a minimum of 100 hours of placement in bachelor courses. That obviously fluctuates depending on your—

**MS ORR:** For psychology, it would be higher than that?

**Miss Geoffroy:** For a bachelor degree in psychology, there are 100 hours of placement. If you continue and end up doing your masters, there are over 1,000 hours of placement. As part of psychology specifically, 500 hours of the placement for UC students are not paid at the UC health and wellbeing centre. They have a chance of doing the second 500 hours by going to a private practice per se and possibly being paid for those 500 hours, but, for the initial 500, it is expected that you will not be paid.

**MS ORR:** How much of that is a course requirement as opposed to a requirement for professional accreditation once you have finished?

**Miss Geoffroy:** It is both. The 1,000 hours in a masters degree is an expectation of



completing the masters itself, as well as continuing on to be registered as a psychologist. It is the same with the 100 hours for a bachelor degree. That does not have to be in a clinical setting; it can be in any number of fields, but it is still an unpaid placement and expected of the bachelor degree.

**MS ORR:** With the bachelor degree—I am trying to get my head around what this all—

**Ms Ahmed:** I might help with answering the question as well. There are mandatory placements and then there are elective placements, but usually, for most health degrees, you have to do placements as a mandatory requirement of the profession. For health students doing degrees, some are not mentioned in the stipends that will be provided next year—for example, pharmacy students and optometry students. I believe physiology students were not mentioned, nor psychology students or speech pathology students. These are really important professions that we need in the ACT. We acknowledge that there have been efforts by the ACT government to, for example, provide scholarships to nursing students and pay them for the internships, but this does not cover all students who are currently in the system and are trying to graduate and contribute back to Canberra.

**MS ORR:** That is helpful. Thank you. Going back to Miss Geoffroy, are the 100 hours in bachelor degrees required for professional accreditation or are they—

**Miss Geoffroy:** No.

**MS ORR:** Because you do not get accredited from your bachelor degree; it is a university—

**Miss Geoffroy:** To be a clinical psychologist, you have to do your bachelor degree and honours, or a graduate certificate, and then a masters, and you only start getting professionally accredited at your masters level. The hundred hours are specifically for that bachelor degree.

**MS ORR:** This is the bit I am trying to get my head around: how much of it is imposed by professional requirements? I am not from the health side, but my profession requires accreditation and stuff too. How much of it is done by the professional body and how much of it is, say, part of the course component and the choice of the university to make sure that you have practical experience? I appreciate that a lot of the health examples that you mentioned would apply to the same situation.

**Miss Geoffroy:** I am not actually 100 per cent sure, profession-wise, for psychology, but I would assume that it is the university itself, considering that the 100 hours of mandatory placement is across almost all of our bachelor degrees at UC, and I would assume the ANU as well.

**THE CHAIR:** Miss Nuttall, a supplementary question?

**MISS NUTTALL:** I have a supplementary to Ms Orr's question. You mentioned the payments that the federal government is putting in. I think it is \$319—

**Miss Geoffroy:** It is \$319.50, but that is means-tested.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Regarding students who undertake those courses, have you received any feedback about whether they find it sufficient to cover their living expenses?

**Miss Geoffroy:** I can say from my personal experience that it will not even cover rent, and it is means-tested. I am not what one would call a generic student. I was a public servant before I decided to go back to study. I have a mortgage and the big bills that come with that, so I automatically means-test out. I have too many assets and my earning capacity is too high to get any payments. I have a lot of friends who live on campus and say the \$319.50 will maybe cover their rent on campus and the bills associated with that, but it will not cover groceries or living a normal teenage life. And, as great as that additional payment might be, like we said earlier, it only covers teaching, nursing and social work students. There are so many students who are left out of that.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Going to a substantive question, could you walk me through the experiences of you and your peers? What would a regular week look like during mandatory placements? And, if you are comfortable sharing, what are the expenses that you have to balance if you are, say, living from home without financial support from your family?

**Ms Ahmed:** I am happy to share. I am doing a Bachelor of Pharmacy course. I have already been in one placement, which was for two weeks. Usually, it is from 9 to 5, and you get a half-hour break in the middle. In the dispensary, along with the pharmacist and other dispensary technicians, you are observing and you are helping out. There is a booklet of set things that you need to complete, but it really depends on the situation at the pharmacy—how busy it is and how free the pharmacist is to go through that checklist. Usually, you need to pay for your transportation. It is not always easy to find a place near where you live. Sometimes, because Canberra is quite small and there is a good number of pharmacy students, you may not be able to find a placement within Canberra, so you will try to look at rural areas or suburbs farther away.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Thank you. Regarding dire financial positions, have people who have talked to you stopped doing their degree or put it on hold so they can afford to live rather than study?

**Ms Ahmed:** I have heard from some students who have mentioned the possibility of pausing their academic journey because the debt is too high for them to continue studying, especially if they have to continue doing placements. They have to work for a long time to be able to offset the costs that come from the placement period. Quite a few also mentioned having to explore the option of living in their cars, especially if they are doing a placement outside of the ACT, because the cost of paying for rent at both their existing home and a new place is simply not possible for them. That is a huge cry for help, especially during winter. It should not be something that we are considering.

**Miss Kagucia:** I have spoken to a lot of students who have also looked at dropping to

part-time. The ones that I have spoken to are looking at clinical psychology in the long run. That requires a minimum of six years of study. By dropping that to part-time, they are looking at 12 years. Financially, they will be able to afford life a little bit easier because they are not studying so heavily, but they are not going to be in a financial position to live the life that they want to—in their words, having a “big boy job” as soon as they would like. That ultimately starts to affect their mental health as well. Then they start looking at dropping out or alternatives that are, like Ms Ahmed said, not great ones—living in your car or deciding to skip a couple of meals, or what have you, just to get by.

**Ms Ahmed:** May I also talk about the impact of placements on international students? The moment that they start falling back and are not able to continue on their academic journey, there are implications on their visa. Changing the time of a visa is quite difficult. It is doubly hard because the fee is already really high. Then they have to pay rent twice, where they live and where they are going to study. They are not working, so there is an incapacity to earn any money. And, if they fall behind in their academic journey, they have to start negotiating with the government and the university again to get a new confirmation of enrolment to get new visa terms. It is really quite difficult. That is an additional cost, because they have to pay extra money to change any terms of their visa. It almost feels like an impossible hill to climb. They keep struggling and feel that they are going to lose or lose their life.

**Miss Kagucia:** I have spoken to a couple of students who have looked at doing their placements in a rural area, just because there is a lot more assistance for students who are willing to go rural—to places that most students would not want to do their placement—but, ultimately, they become very isolated from their cohort, their family and their friends, and they come back debating whether they want to continue their studies, because they have usually spent four to six weeks out there. The University of Canberra has some really great initiatives with foodbanks and things like that to supply food for students, but, ultimately, that comes out of our SSAFs. Students are actually paying to receive those benefits.

**MS ORR:** I have a quick question for the SRC. We heard from the psychology group that, in some placements, they have to be unpaid; they cannot have paid hours. You cited a lot of other courses outside of psychology. Are you aware of whether they have to be unpaid or whether they can do paid placements as part of the qualification, such as for pharmacy or the allied health ones that you listed?

**Ms Ahmed:** Usually, it is a requirement for it to be unpaid in order to be considered part of a degree. If it is paid, it might not be counted. I believe that, for some degrees, you can be paid for your internship, but that would not be a payment; it would be a stipend provided by the organisation where you study. That is usually for law students or other degrees, not usually health.

**Miss Geoffroy:** A lot of companies build around those unpaid internships, so the likelihood of negotiating a payment is very unlikely as well.

**Ms Ahmed:** We also want to raise that, in all this conversation, it is important to check whether there is equitable access to education in the ACT. For example, all these issues apply to all students who go into mandatory placement, but this also

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includes people who have to take care of their family. There are unpaid carers. It also includes students who are from low-income backgrounds. It includes a lot of different equity groups, and they are all going through the same issue.

**THE CHAIR:** That has brought us to the end of this session. On behalf of the committee, I thank the University of Canberra's Student Representative Council and Psychology Society for attending. A transcript will be provided to you, so please cast your eyes over that. If there are any amendments, please send them through. Thank you for appearing.

**LINCOLN, PROFESSOR MICHELLE**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic,  
University of Canberra

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome on behalf of this committee. We have in front of us Professor Michelle Lincoln from the University of Canberra. Thank you for appearing today. I would like to remind you of the privileges and obligations afforded to you by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement in front of you. Are you able to confirm if you agree to the terms of that privilege statement?

**Prof Lincoln:** Yes. I agree to the privilege statement.

**MS ORR:** Thank you. Professor Lincoln, I think you were in the gallery and probably would have caught a bit of the previous testimony.

**Prof Lincoln:** How impressive are our students!

**MS ORR:** I am interested to get your perspective on a few of the issues that have come up as a result of that testimony, looking particularly at the unpaid hours and clarifying whether that is across all the degrees, and the expectations of the university for the bachelor courses, and getting an understanding from your perspective as to what supports are put in place to achieve that.

**Prof Lincoln:** Sure. There are two types of courses, really. One is where placements are required; they are mandatory for students to do them and they tend to be in health and education. I would add that it is not one placement; it is multiple placements. Nursing students, for example, do four; physio students do five five-week placements, et cetera. Then there are other courses where it is not mandatory but at UC, because one of our strengths is employability and work integrated learning, students have the option of doing a work integrated learning process. It is an elective that they choose to do or not do. If they choose not to do an elective placement, we have other industry based projects that do not require that same kind of commitment from students. So, there are two groups, really. We, of course, encourage all of our students, though, to do a placement or internship because we know they are better for it.

**MS ORR:** Is it fair to say most of the health and allied health courses would require a placement?

**Prof Lincoln:** It is fair to say that all of them would—and multiple ones.

**MS ORR:** Yes. So what supports are in place from the university to help? You said physio does five, for example, which is quite a lot. What supports are in place to help with that extra work?

**Prof Lincoln:** The thing to remember is, when students do placements, they are doing them as part of a unit of study, so they get credit for it in their university degree. So that means they are not doing other things while they are doing their placement. We find the placements. We place the students into them. We do all the compliance checking that allows them to go on placement. They have to have vaccinations and a whole range of things.

In terms of support for students to go, we do have a fund, a placement support fund. In that fund is about \$240,000 a year. At the moment we have another \$140,000 from the ACT government that is supporting students for this year because of the cost-of-living crisis. That placement support is available to a restricted range of students in courses where there is workforce need.

Students apply for that funding, and we prioritise students from equity backgrounds. We also prioritise students who are going out of area, and we also have a sliding scale for the length of the placement. Obviously an eight-week placement, like the occupational therapy students do, has a much bigger impact than a two-week placement that some other students might do. Students apply and we provide them with that cash funding. There is scattered placement internship funding they can apply for through New South Wales Health, for example, and some of the professional associations, but that is sort of where it sits.

While students are on placement, we, of course, support them with wellbeing services, counselling, medical services, et cetera. We also run accommodation in Cooma, Bega and Moruya for our students at a low cost. It is \$25 a night for students that go to do placements on the South Coast. So we try to offset the cost a little bit there. It is really a cleaning fee, to be honest, that they pay. It runs at a loss, but it is important.

**MS ORR:** With the fund, what is the average amount that people can get?

**Prof Lincoln:** It is between \$450 and \$680 for a placement.

**MS ORR:** For a placement, yes.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Your submission mentioned that in relation to the clinical placements, the places are scarce and the university struggles to provide them, especially in proximity to campuses. Do not feel like you have to give an exact number, but roughly what proportion of students would you say are able to get placements close to campus, or even within the ACT?

**Prof Lincoln:** All of our health students would get some of their placements in the ACT, but they may need to do one or two outside of the ACT. The exception is medical radiation sciences, which is a professional degree for diagnostic radiography; those students we have enormous difficulty getting placements for in the ACT. All of our education teachers, our teachers-in-training, would have placements in the ACT—most of them. To be honest, we encourage them to do a rural placement if they can, because it is such great experience for them. We understand that not all students can, so we will prioritise students who have children, for example, to have placements in the ACT. It is a juggling act, as you can imagine.

**MISS NUTTALL:** If you do not mind me asking, what is the main challenge with securing those placements within the ACT? Is it the number of students that the workplace is able to support safely and sustainably? Is it a supervision thing?

**Prof Lincoln:** It is availability. This inquiry is constructed as “unpaid work”. We do not think of it as work. It is learning. Actually, these are learning opportunities for

students. They may do some work and will do some work while they are on placement, but they are not an employee of that organisation. They are in a learner-supervisor relationship not an employer-employee relationship. So that requires a commitment from the government department or the industry that they are being placed in, and they can require additional time, obviously, for orientation and learning and explaining.

Mushtaha gave you a lovely example of pharmacy. She was probably preparing medications in the back of the pharmacy but supervised 100 per cent by a pharmacist, I hope. So, it takes a commitment and there are limitations on how many students can be placed within organisations within a year.

We sit in a difficult territory between workforce demand and availability of placements quite often. There is a big demand in the workforce for health professionals but the capacity of the community to supervise them can be limited. It is one of the reasons why we have a large on-campus clinic where we can give students placements on our own campus.

**MS ORR:** Professor, implicit within a lot of the testimony that has come forward is that a lot of the student cohort have to work either part-time or even potentially full-time. They have caring responsibilities with families. There are a lot of needs within their life. With the placement that obviously impacts, and parents have to drop all of that. Noting it is a critical part of the learning, how can we better balance that? I get what you are saying in that we need this to have good learning outcomes. From the student representatives we just heard that it did impact on their life even if it is just for a short period of time. What work is being done to better reconcile the two?

**Prof Lincoln:** Yes, good question. We are very aware of the circumstances of our students, and I support everything they said. It can be very difficult. What we hear most frequently from students is the inability to earn their regular income while they are on placement. That is the issue for them. What can be done? I think what we are trying to do is to negotiate more flexible placement arrangements for students so that they are part-time, rather than full-time, so the impost is not as great in a week.

We are very grateful to the commonwealth government for the new arrangements with the placement payments. Although, we do not know how they are going to be means-tested. That information is not available yet. A little bit of what was said there we do not know, actually—that that is how it will be means-tested. It will be interesting to see how they are disbursed going forward. I think bursaries and placement support costs are always helpful. It is probably fair to say we never have enough to meet all of the need, but we try and do it as fairly and transparently as we can. Having more funding in that space is helpful. Certainly, the ACT government funding has been very welcome as well.

We are also exploring virtual placements for students. A good outcome from COVID, I guess, was that opportunity for students to do placements in organisations, in big companies, virtually, so they do not have to travel. They do not have to leave home. We have had some success with that and great feedback, both from the placement providers and from the students, about that opportunity. We have had some of them being international, so students have been working with groups in Hong Kong and

Singapore. I think we need to get a little bit more creative about how we do this. There is a combination of funding, flexibility and exploring new models, I think, about how to do it.

**MS ORR:** Are you able to provide us a little bit more insight into the types of placements that would be required for courses and the frequency across the degree of those placements?

**Prof Lincoln:** Sure. I heard your question before. In a course where the placements are mandatory, there will be a requirement from the accrediting body. In nursing, it is 800 hours of placement. We have designed our course so all students will meet that requirement. Eight hundred hours happens over, I think, four placements over the three years of the degree for nursing students, and it varies in length from two weeks in the beginning, which is a quick look—“do I really want to be a nurse” kind of placement—up to being fully on board for, I think, five weeks at the end of the course.

Occupational therapy students do, I think, three eight-week placements. As I said, physios do five five-week placements. Social workers are required to do two three-month placements. It is enormous and it is partly why I think they have been included in that commonwealth government funding. Let me think, which other ones do I know off the top of my head?

**MS ORR:** Something like, say, pharmacy? That has come up a bit.

**Prof Lincoln:** Pharmacy is a little different. They have a post-graduation registration year, where they work as a paid internship in a pharmacy. In their degree they have to do a placement in a community pharmacy and a placement in a hospital pharmacy. Their placement requirement is a little bit less than some of our other degrees, actually.

**MS ORR:** That is interesting, because when you are talking about creative ways to do something—having essentially a traineeship year or apprenticeship year, whatever we want to call it—being paid seems to overcome some of these issues and still provides the learning. Is there the opportunity to do that across more of the degrees, and what are the impediments to actually doing it?

**Prof Lincoln:** Yes, and we used to have more of that. I do know in diagnostic radiography, medical radiation sciences, universities absorbed that year into their degree. So they went from three years to four years, because access to a paid year was a blockage in the workforce pipeline, essentially. There were not enough of those for the number of graduates who were needed for the workforce. Students who were graduating could not get their year and then never entered the workforce. So there are swings and roundabouts on it. You have to have enough to meet the need to make that work.

**MS ORR:** Just out of curiosity, with having that year, why are the two placements still needed as part of the degree?

**Prof Lincoln:** I think it is because, as students are learning—I mean, they are learning their theory—they need to have some understanding of the practical context in which it will be applied. I am a big supporter of work integrated learning. I think it changes



the dynamic for the students and their motivation. Sadly, for universities, when we get our feedback on courses, students will always say the best part was the placement or internship. Too bad about all the amazing lectures and the equipment and tutorials and things we set up! It is really significant and really motivating. That integration of theory and practice is really important. The question is always how much of that do you need to do? Obviously having an internship-type year reduces the need within the university curriculum.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Is information about the length of placements for each course and the number of students that tend to take it publicly available? Is it collected? Is it also obvious to students going into it?

**Prof Lincoln:** I cannot speak for all universities, but we make that really clear on our website. If I may, one of my concerns about the commonwealth government funding for those particular professional groups is that it may well influence the choice of students, and particularly equity students. I do not think that is a good thing.

**MS ORR:** In that people might have chosen another course if the supports were applied to it?

**Prof Lincoln:** Yes. If you are from an equity background, maybe you can only afford to do nursing because that is where the support is, but you really wanted to do physio, or you really wanted to do pharmacy, or something else. There you go—unintended consequences.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Regarding the Work Integrated Learning Support Scheme, do you track which courses the recipients are doing? Do you know which courses tend to be best represented and do you know whether they, say, correlate with how long the placement is?

**Prof Lincoln:** We would have that information. I could not say with confidence which ones attract the most applications. As a general principle, though, the longer the placement, the more difficult it is for students, of course. The flip side of that is the longer they are on placement, the more valuable they are to the placement site and the industry, because they have been there longer and they know how to work. They can be more productive and learn more in that environment. So we are always balancing that one up a little bit. But I could find out if you are interested—if there are any professional groups that needed to access that support more frequently. Is that what you are asking?

**MISS NUTTALL:** Yes, absolutely.

**Prof Lincoln:** Sure.

**MS ORR:** Outside of the health and allied health professions and teaching, what other groups require the placements? We have said there are ones where there is a requirement to get accreditation to practise in that field, and there are others where you want to make sure that they have the applied knowledge. We are just trying to get a bit of a breakdown. Health and allied health and teaching are pretty obvious. Are there any others in addition?

**Prof Lincoln:** Look, I think architecture is another one. I think accountancy and law. I think it is optional in some of the creative industries and design spaces and in business, for example. But, of course, those students absolutely want to do placement. IT is an elective, but, again, it is something that all students want to do if they can.

**MS ORR:** It really is fair to say, the bulk is in those health and allied health—

**Prof Lincoln:** The required placements—and education.

**MISS NUTTALL:** In a perfect world where students' needs were being met, does the university have a view as to the baseline stipend that you would need to allocate a student, based on the day or hours worked, in order for them to live comfortably and not take on a lot of the mental and financial health burdens that we have heard about?

**Prof Lincoln:** A small percentage of our placements are paid and usually by private industry. If they are paid, then we require them to pay our students the basic wage. That would be our starting point.

**THE CHAIR:** Minimum wage.

**Prof Lincoln:** Yes.

**MS ORR:** I think it was mentioned that some of the placements have to be unpaid.

**Prof Lincoln:** Correct.

**MS ORR:** Can I just get a bit of an understanding of the rationale behind it?

**Prof Lincoln:** Yes, so with nursing, for example, students cannot claim any paid hours towards their 800 hours. The idea being that if someone is in employment and being paid, they are not able to take advantage of the learning opportunities and they are not supervised. Therefore, it is not learning, it is working and should be paid. It is also not part of the learning journey, I guess. I am just trying to think. The other part to consider too, for health students, in particular, who go into primary health care and into private practice, is that you cannot claim Medicare for services delivered by students. Therefore, there is no income generation from any services they deliver in that context, so they, by their very nature, have to be unpaid.

I cannot think of any professional groups that explicitly rule it out, in terms of pay. From a university perspective, when a student is being paid, as I say, it changes the dynamic to becoming an employer-employee relationship. It changes the insurance context. Our students are all insured by us when they are on placement. If they are employed by someone, they are not. They are employed by them. It also introduces conflict of interest in the assessment process. Students are assessed by the supervisor. What does it mean if you are assessed by someone who is employing you and you have not passed? So it really does change that dynamic and has to be managed very delicately, actually.

**THE CHAIR:** Well, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for

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appearing today. A transcript will be provided to you. Please feel free to cast your eyes over it. I do not think there were any questions taken on notice in this session?

**Prof Lincoln:** One.

**THE CHAIR:** One. I was not too sure if it was or not. If you could provide answers to that question on notice within a week from today's date, that would be greatly appreciated. Otherwise, thank you for attending.

**Hearing suspended from 12.01 to 2 pm.**

**BAIL, PROFESSOR KASIA**, Workforce Lead, University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation

**GIBSON, PROFESSOR DIANE**, Director, University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome back to today's public hearing of the Standing Committee on the Economy and Gender and Economic Equality for its inquiry into unpaid work. I now welcome representatives of the University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation. You have a pink privilege statement in front of you that talks about the privileges and obligations under parliamentary privilege. Could you please indicate whether you have read the privilege statement and agree to comply with it?

**Prof Gibson:** I am happy to conform to the privilege statement.

**Prof Bail:** I also accept the privilege statement and will conform.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Would you like to make a brief opening statement or would you like to go straight to questions?

**Ms Gibson:** We expected to go straight into questions, as our notification from the secretariat said that there would be no opening statements on this occasion.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. On page 2 of your submission you say that there was a decreasing trend in volunteers—something we have heard from other submissions as well. Can you talk us through what you have experienced or found out?

**Prof Gibson:** The overall evidence in Australia talks about this decreasing trend in volunteers, which is noted in the paper. In relation to older people, which, as you are aware, is the focus of our submission, we feel it may have been affected by COVID. Specifically, in the ACT, we had the shutdowns and, during those periods, older people were very much discouraged from continuing in their volunteering roles. I think at certain points, it is fair to say—please correct me if I am wrong, because this is an official hearing—that organisations were told not to allow older volunteers to continue to participate. In my own community, I am aware of one older woman who had been a volunteer in the food pantry in north Canberra for many, many years, and who was very distraught and tearful at losing that role during that period. The question for us, as concerned citizens, as politicians and as researchers, is whether or not that trend can be reversed. So that is the COVID influence. As to the general reasons underpinning the decline of volunteering, I would have to defer to people more expert in volunteering than ourselves.

**THE CHAIR:** Certainly, COVID would have had a bit of an impact. Are they slowly coming back or has it subsided since then?

**Prof Gibson:** I do not think we have the data in the ACT, but it would certainly be a really good question. I think it is a question that should be asked, and we should interrogate the data if it is possible. Someone should interrogate the data to check on that. We should also be aware, I suppose, that, as the labour force engagement of older people is steadily increasing, they may have less time and energy available for

volunteering. As we all know, there is 24 hours in the day, and it is quite a big increase in some of those age groups over time.

**MS ORR:** We heard a lot this morning from groups representing people who volunteer about it being taken as unpaid work, but there was a little bit of commentary too about how it is not actually unpaid work, because volunteering is a different proposition to work. I was interested in your work, looking particularly at carers and the research you do around there, where we are starting to get to the point of people providing care that could actually be considered unpaid work, because if they were not doing it you would have to get someone who is paid. I was wondering if you had any reflections not so much on the volunteering—and particularly from a wellbeing aspect for the person who is undertaking it, including the connection and overcoming isolation and loneliness—but more from the sense of people, particularly within, say, a caring space or something similar, where they are doing something that is a little bit more in this concept of unpaid work as opposed to volunteering, and what observations you might take away from that?

**Prof Gibson:** I am going to ask Kasia to jump in in a moment, but I entirely agree with you that the volunteering role is a very different role to that of unpaid care for someone with chronic illness or disability. One can opt in and out of volunteering; one cannot, in relation to an unpaid caring role that one has taken on. I am not sure that “unpaid caring” is quite the right phrase, because, typically, we provide informal care to loved ones, whether they are family, friends or neighbours.

One thing we did want to say today—and I was almost tempted to make an opening statement—was that we would like the inquiry to be very cognisant of some of the stereotypes that undermine the development of good policy. For example, in the case of informal carers—

**Prof Bail:** The 43 per cent.

**Prof Gibson:** Yes. We think this is important.

**Prof Bail:** We think there is often an assumption that it is children caring for their older parents and that their older parents are dependent, and perhaps not always recognising the spousal dependency, where carers often do not even recognise themselves as carers because they are just looking after the person that they love. So 43 per cent of the carers are spouses. That means that, as the spouse ages, also the carer is ageing—so just recognising that as a key part of the population.

**Prof Gibson:** So 43 per cent are spouse-carers. Of the remainder, about half and half, or quarter and a quarter—we will not go to heavily into the statistics—are people caring for their children, for disabled children; and people, very commonly women, caring for their ageing parents. I think that another interesting lens here is that people often say, “The informal carers are all women.” But in the spouse-carers—may I have a drum roll—the percentage is—

**Prof Bail:** For those over 60 about 49 per cent are men.

**MS ORR:** So it is a little bit closer to parity.

**Prof Gibson:** For spouse-carers over the age of 60. When you are developing policy, you have to think about men, not just women, and you have to think about older people, not just that “sandwich generation”—a phrase that I have come to somewhat dislike that conjures up the image of people who are simultaneously caring for eight-year-olds and 80-year-olds, which, if you think about it, is biologically fairly difficult. It is often the case that that 80-year-old would be a grandparent. The sandwich generation is true for some women, but it has become a meme, an easy way of thinking about it; whereas, in fact, it is multigenerational.

**MS ORR:** What I am taking from this is that, when we start looking at unpaid caring—though I think you used a different term—

**Prof Gibson:** I would call it informal caring, but I do not think there is any right or wrong here.

**MS ORR:** The takeaway, from what you seem to be saying, is that it is far more nuanced and complex than perhaps we sometimes recognise in the policy work that we are doing. I want to keep going on this a little bit, because an interesting discussion that is coming up on this is: what is volunteer work, what is paid work and what is unpaid work that should be paid work? We touched on that a little bit, particularly with Vinnies, this morning, regarding how they determine what is a volunteer position and what is a paid position. I cannot remember which one of you said it, but there was a comment in that last bit of testimony that, even though it is informal care and unpaid care work, it is actually just seen as looking after your partner. In that regard, you might say that you could not really replace it with a paid job because the person would not necessarily want us to do that. How do we get the balance right and how do we support the person doing it?

**Prof Bail:** When that person runs out of energy, skills or abilities, or it gets harder than they have the capacity for, or they become unwell as well, that is when it becomes a paid replacement. That is when they end up having a hospital admission. That is when they are often propping each other up to some degree. That is how we all tend to work in relationships.

**MS ORR:** In the work and the research that you have done, because it is quite an emotive area, getting people to recognise that they might not be in a position to do the informal and they need to start looking at something more formal, how easy is that and what barriers are there? One of the questions before the committee is: how do we help people doing this this work? This seems like a cohort that we need to understand a bit better.

**Prof Gibson:** I think in terms of support for informal carers, one of the things to remember is that around a third of informal carers have a disability themselves. Although, “disability” is a very broad term, seven or eight per cent have a profound or severe disability, which is not a broad term. It means that you are facing a lot of challenges in your daily life, looking after yourself. That population of informal carers can be in need of health supports, wellbeing supports and disability supports themselves. They have more difficulty navigating some of the complex systems. That is one important thing about supporting carers.

Another issue came through a quite specific study we were doing, trying to understand nutritional aspects for people who are carers of people with dementia, so you are getting pretty specific. They were saying, “It is so hard to find educational resources that will help us to be good carers.” I think you would be very aware of how important it is to human beings to feel capable in what they are doing. If you feel like you are doing a really lousy job, it is not very good for your wellbeing or morale. They talked about being able to access educational resources. They said that, when you go onto the web, you do not know what is right and what is wrong. So there is a need for curated educational resources that enable them to be better carers and to know where to go.

That comes through, I guess, in the SPICE program, that 12-week intervention, where they have the luxury of 2½ hours twice a week and where they can ask questions, develop relationships and see how they can improve things. Is there something you would like to add? Please tell me if I have gone on a tangent to your question.

**MS ORR:** No; that is fine. There are no right or wrong answers.

**Prof Gibson:** I have gone towards the supporting carers line.

**MS ORR:** It was more that part of the support is recognising that the carer cannot continue to do what they have previously done.

**Prof Bail:** I think that there is something before that as well. Obviously, as I am a nurse and I work in hospitals, I do see that all the time, and we have that challenge of whether a person is safe to go home. There is a long pathway before that that I think we have an opportunity to work in, which SPICE does really beautifully, where we are supporting carers to recognise changes in dementia and put in strategies that help them live their lives as they want to, in supporting the disease processes that they might be going through. Sometimes that is about a self-care need recognition for the carer, about what else they need to do to stay well for as long as possible for them to stay home and independent for as long as possible and to contribute to society, whether it is in church or whatever else keeps their lives meaningful.

Sometimes I think if we just focus on that transition point and decision-making, we are missing all the opportunities before that. When the nurses at the hospital heard about the SPICE program, they said, “This will really help. We will have a population of people who have skills to help continue living at home,” rather than seeing it as a barrier between “I am at home” or “I need to go somewhere else or get other official care” when there are just so many grey areas in between that.

**Prof Gibson:** Those grey areas are important because there is a process perhaps of accepting or coming to a decision that one might need some additional help at home in caring for this person. It might be specialist help with allied health or exercise support. It might be domestic help, in that you do not have the energy or capacity to do your vacuuming or whatever it might be. It might also be personal care, because you can no longer manage that person in the shower. They are all parts of the journey.

I think it is important, particularly with regard to older people, to remember that less

than four per cent of people over the age of 65 are in residential care at any one point in time. Relinquishing informal care to residential aged care is something that happens less often than one might think.

**MISS NUTTALL:** You have talked a lot about people living with dementia and their partners and friends and family who become informal carers. I am also reflecting on a presumption that a lot of grandparents will be available to take care of their kids. Do you think there is a difference in the way older people are perceived and perceive themselves, depending on whether or not they are doing informal or formal unpaid work—caring, as opposed to something like the more formal volunteering opportunities?

**Prof Gibson:** That is such an interesting question. I do not know the answer to that, as an academic researcher, but I think that you would expect that there would be differences. One is likely to be based on interests and companionship—as in, for example, being the secretary of the kayaking club—and one is based on relationships and love, as in caring for a grandchild. But that is all I have to offer on that one, although it is a great question.

**Prof Bail:** Maybe there is something there—and I do not know how this fits in terms of the evidence base—about the satisfaction that they are getting from contributing to it and, I guess, the risk-benefit analysis. I think that is where COVID came in, where, even if they wanted to continue volunteering, even if they were allowed to, they also had to consider the risk to themselves and to their family around them. I think that individual choice about risk-benefit often comes in, and that is where paid can compensate for any of that risk. Obviously, they were in a different space about the volunteer or unpaid.

**Prof Gibson:** There may be an aspect of recognition, which I think perhaps you were hinting at—that one gets recognition from paid work. I am a distinguished professor at the University of Canberra. One does not get much recognition for, “I cared for my grandchild for five minutes.” I actually did not because I cannot—because I am really bad at it. I truly am, as it happens. I was surprised. Society values the “formal” label more than the lesser label. There can be even expectations that you will, as a grandparent, look after the energetic five-year-old for hours on end, and maybe that is not something you want to do, even though you love your family.

**MS ORR:** I want to go back to the idea of relinquishing caring responsibilities and the comments Professor Gibson made at the beginning about making sure that sometimes we are checking our biases in how we think about caring. Is there anything you would like the committee to consider around how to support carers when they have to relinquish that care—for their own wellbeing or other health reasons?

**Prof Gibson:** Relinquish entirely or relinquish in bringing in additional formal support?

**MS ORR:** Both; yes.

**Prof Gibson:** With regard to bringing in formal supports, knowledge of what is available and control over what happens is really critical. That goes to information



and support—although that is such a generic term that I do not even like to hear myself using it. In relation to the transition to, say, residential aged care, that is a really complicated area both financially and emotionally. I think I would step back from that because I do not have expertise.

**Prof Bail:** I would suggest using the frameworks of dignity, of risk and of supported decision-making in the human rights kinds of framing devices. In some ways, there should not be a relinquishing of care in terms of legal capacity—like who is making decisions. If you have a supportive decision-making framework and you have the right kinds of supports, that becomes a shared decision. It is always going to be hard. There are good advocacy groups who have skills in that, but we actually need our workforce to have more skills in that as well.

We are working on trans-boundary opportunities and looking at these cross-service opportunities, because sometimes there is this really hard line, so it does become this kind of relinquishing, whereas we should have more opportunity for support in transitions. I think sometimes carers and individuals will avoid accessing care because they are worried about that precisely. That then makes it harder to support people in perhaps some of those softer interventions—I know that consumers hate that word—and support structures that can help them live well for longer.

**Prof Gibson:** You see advertisements on television saying that you can put your parents or your mother or your loved one in this wonderful home. But often that person that is being put into the home does have the ability to make their own decisions.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, we would like to thank you both for appearing today. You will receive a transcript of today's hearing. Please cast your eyes over it and provide feedback or amendments that you might see. Thank you very much for coming today.

**Prof Gibson:** Thank you for the opportunity to appear.

**REED, MX KAT**, Chief Executive Officer, Women with Disabilities ACT

**NEWMAN, MX PIPPA**, Senior Policy Officer, Women with Disabilities ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to this hearing. Now we are hearing from Women with Disabilities. I remind witnesses of the privileges and obligations afforded under parliamentary privilege. Could each of you please state whether you agree with the pink privilege statement.

**Mx Reed:** I agree.

**Mx Newman:** I agree with the statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, and welcome. We will go straight to questions, due to the fact that we only have 20 minutes or so. In your submission you talk about people who are on the NDIS and, in some cases, have to manage their own plan. It suggests that they are volunteers, in a sense, because they are managing their own plan, they are managing contracts and they are even, to a point, managing and firing contractors if they are not happy with the service that they are receiving—that is, providing that people who are on an NDIS plan are capable and confident of doing that in the first place. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that and on what we could do, as a government, whether that is at the federal level or the ACT level, to help support people on the NDIS who might be finding it hard to manage their own plans.

**Mx Newman:** This is information that we have heard from our members in our investigations around the NDIS that we undertook last year, prior to the NDIS review. We heard from a lot of them that they had difficulty managing their own supports and often felt that they were actually employers of their own workforce, coordinating their own support workers and appointments and being responsible for the hiring and firing of these people. They said that support was not always available to them or there was a trade-off. If they were to have support coordination, that would be a trade-off for autonomy and choice over who they could get as supports for themselves.

We have heard that support coordination in the ACT is not always fit for purpose for everybody. Obviously, this relies on people being on the NDIS in the first place and qualifying to receive that extra level of support coordination. Not everyone is deemed to be disabled enough to have access to that additional support. We heard from members that changes need to be made, even in opportunities that might arise out of the new foundational supports that are being discussed at the moment, in terms of having an increased navigator function in the ACT and people being able to connect to different supports and have better knowledge of what is available.

We heard from our members that some of the support coordinators were doing hours over and above what was allocated to them, in order for the system to actually work. Through individual members' stories that we have heard, there seems to be the overall pattern that there is not quite enough resourcing in support coordination in the ACT for everything to work effectively, and that results in unpaid labour, both on the part of support coordinators and on the part of the participants in the NDIS. They have to put in a lot of extra effort just to get the baseline supports to be able to participate in society.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mx Newman.

**MS ORR:** I want to pick up on some of the comments you made. I do not know whether you have caught any of the other sessions, but some of what is coming through is the difference between volunteer work, paid work and unpaid work. Volunteering is something you almost do for yourself, because you get some level of enjoyment out of it; paid work is work you do that you are compensated for; and unpaid work broadly falls into the category of work you could be paid for but you do not get paid for it. Picking up on your comments that women with disabilities have a particular lens and specific considerations, how do you see women with disabilities fitting into the three different categories—not so much the paid work but the unpaid work and the volunteering—and what obstacles or benefits are there? What are some things that you think the committee should be aware of?

**Mx Newman:** Something that our members emphasised to us was that all this work is necessary but not necessarily unwanted. Women with disabilities in particular are over-represented among carers for people with disabilities. They are actually twice as likely to be carers for elderly parents or other people with disabilities in their lives, whether it is compensated or not. I do not think it falls neatly into the category of volunteer work versus unpaid work, but it is work that is valuable to people, it is work that they like to do, and they think it is important in many cases. Obviously, people with disabilities do the same kind of volunteer work that everyone else in the community does. They are very active in things like environment volunteering. A bunch of our members do a lot of academic research in a volunteer capacity. It is not always helpful to have a split between—

**MS ORR:** We are currently experiencing technical difficulties. Luckily, we still have 10 minutes left. Pippa, can you hear us?

**Mx Newman:** Can you hear me now?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; we can. We might go straight to Miss Nuttall to continue with questions.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I am mindful that it is probably a bit of an overused term, but when you talk about all the work that you have to do to advocate for yourself, especially as a woman with a disability, is there also an element of unpaid emotional work that goes into that, or is there an element that you specifically take on? Your submission referred to having to work extra hard sometimes to be believed in the health system and maybe also among friends and family.

**Mx Reed:** Absolutely, that is the case, particularly for women with disabilities, who, at every stage of trying to access support, are less likely to be believed and are more likely to experience things like diagnostic overshadowing in the health system, where a disability diagnosis is seen by health professionals to mask other problems that are going on. When each of these things occur, it takes an extra amount of self-advocacy and self-belief, as well as additional time and emotional labour, to communicate what you need at a basic level. That is definitely the case, and it is felt especially by women with disabilities in basically every situation where they advocate for support.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Wow. Are there things that people without a disability or government bodies could do to take some of that emotional work away? Is it about having better communication and better recognition of things like this? What sorts of things could we do to lighten the load?

**Mx Reed:** On a more practical and logistical level, we are excited to see how the new ACT Disability Strategy and ACT Disability Health Strategy provide those supports and those additional pointers, particularly with the health strategy having provisions for additional consultation time and increased awareness of the fact that people with disabilities might have different healthcare needs and different experiences in the healthcare system. They may need additional advocacy and support and additional understanding from healthcare providers. We are interested to see how investments made in the most recent Disability Strategy will work to ease the load, but I think it is also an awareness piece for a broader understanding of disability more generally.

**MS ORR:** I have a supplementary to that. You have raised issues and you have indicated some of the areas where a response is coming from. I appreciate that we are yet to see the change and that you are hopeful but are keeping a careful watch on what happens before having an opinion. I also go back to your conversation about unpaid work and how we can support. One of the things that is twirling around in my mind is: are things already in train to respond to some of the issues that you have raised or are there additional areas that you feel are not being explored and need to be considered?

**Mx Reed:** We are particularly interested in how the piece around foundational supports is going to develop over the next 12 months. The NDIS was something that came up during this discussion with our members as a big element of unpaid work, and there is an understanding that foundational supports could be the missing piece to fill in some of the gaps, to increase support coordination and navigation. But, because there is no framework yet for what this will actually look like in practice, it is all dependent on how that unfolds over next year, in collaboration with the federal government as well. That is my understanding. We point to the importance of really strong consultation and co-design with the disability community in the ACT as those supports are being developed, because that is the single biggest chance for those gaps to be filled and for those supports to be identified and funded through this new program. It is a really exciting opportunity but one that does not currently have a strong framework behind it.

**MS ORR:** It is still early days in the development of it.

**Mx Reed:** Very much so.

**MS ORR:** Is it fair to say that the opportunities to respond to the issues are there; it is just about making sure that the response happens to the best of its potential? Is that where you think we are up to?

**Mx Reed:** Yes; absolutely.

**MS ORR:** Going back to the bit where the audio dropped out—the difference between volunteer work and unpaid work—we focused on that a bit. I think you have

taken unpaid work to be for the sorts of things you need to do to make sure that you can navigate the bureaucracy. That seems to be it. Is there anything else you want to observe? Are there any barriers to volunteering for people with disabilities that you would like to see removed? Are there any final thoughts before we finish?

**Mx Reed:** Absolutely. A lot of it comes back to physical accessibility. That was something that was raised by one of our members who really enjoyed volunteering and getting out into the community but could not, for various physical accessibility reasons, such as losing access to a wheelchair. That meant that access to volunteering activities was cut for particular activities that do not have physical accessibility. I will leave it at that. Those are probably the main things. There is a broader piece about how are we making all infrastructure, all organisations and all activities in the ACT accessible.

**THE CHAIR:** Does anyone have any pressing questions that they would like to ask before we close?

**MISS NUTTALL:** That has answered a lot of mine. Thank you.

**MS ORR:** I do, but I think we do not have time.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. Thank you, Mx Newman and Mx Reed, for coming along today and speaking to the committee. A transcript will be provided to you both. Please feel free to cast your eyes over that and provide any amendments to *Hansard*, if there are any. There were no questions taken on notice, so we do not need to go through that. Thank you for appearing.

**Mx Newman:** Thank you so much for having us, and apologies again for the technical difficulties.

**THE CHAIR:** We get those same issues.

**Short suspension.**

**KELLY, MS LISA**, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT

**JOHNSON, MISS JESSICA**, Policy Officer, Carers ACT

**THE CHAIR:** We now welcome Ms Kelly and Miss Johnson from Carers ACT. Thank you for appearing today and also for your written submission to this inquiry. The protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege are written on the pink statement in front of you. Can you indicate whether you have read and agree to the privilege statement that is in front of you?

**Miss Johnson:** I have read and agree with the privilege statement.

**Ms Kelly:** I have read and agree with the statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We might go straight to questions, if you are happy to do that. Then, if we miss anything, towards the end of our hearing you can always let us know. In your submission you say that lifetime earnings are reduced by around \$39,600 if you are a primary carer. Could you walk us through how you came to that figure and the implications of this?

**Ms Kelly:** Yes. Carers ACT is part of a national network, the National Carer Network, which combines with Carers Australia to provide national policy and advocacy advice on behalf of the more than two millions carers in Australia. As a collective, we contributed to research under the *Caring costs us* report. We talk about replacement care costs, which range in the billions. We know that for a lot of carers it is not actually replacement care that is the issue for them; the issue is actually what the cost is to them and their own economic situation that causes the impact.

We asked the economists to evaluate how lifetime earnings would be reduced for a carer who was caring for somebody for 20 hours a week, over a period of time—both in terms of annual income and superannuation—and what the longer term impact is for carers. Carers often have a lifetime of care and are put into poverty and low economic situations while caring but then continue to be in that situation for the rest of their life, due to the loss of superannuation and income earning that they have had while caring. That was how that figure was obtained. Please do not ask me to give you the way in which the economists pulled that together, because that is way beyond my capacity and capability.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we get the gist of it.

**Miss Johnson:** I do have the caring report for you that I brought along today, and it tells you exactly how they have come up with that figure.

**MS ORR:** Maybe you can table that one.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; we are happy to accept that as an exhibit. Thank you very much. What feedback have you received from carers volunteering in the family environment in terms of what the government could be doing to help support them emotionally, physically and financially, going forward? Have you received any feedback as to what the government could be doing or could do more of?

**Ms Kelly:** I will start by saying that all of what we present to government is based on feedback that we receive from carers. We take our role as representing unpaid family and friend carers very seriously, in terms of being informed by and leaning to our values of being centred around what it is carers want and tell us. Any recommendation we make is based on what it is that carers have told us.

We could probably break it down into a couple of different categories. The first category for carers that is really important and becoming louder in the voices is the need for recognition—and not recognition that is a ball, an awards ceremony, a carers week or a once in a year activity, but meaningful recognition and acknowledgement of the role they play. We are asking for government to consider what a carer recognition card would look like. That is not a card that is about discounts or benefits in any particular way, but a card that I can bring out when the doctor says, “Why do you believe you have got a right to know this information?” and then I can say, “Well, because I am a carer and here is the card that recognises that.” Also, “Why do I need to not stand in this line at Access Canberra? Because I am a carer, standing in line is something that is really difficult for me. Here is my card to prove that.”

It also about feeling like we are part of a club and that we are not alone—that we are not doing this on our own—and I have this card that shows me that government values who I am, what I do and what I contribute, and that I am not a paid support worker and I am not a volunteer and I have not made a choice to do this; it is something that has happened through circumstances. It is something that the government recognises as valuable. It shows that I am socially and economically participating in the community, even if I am not working—because I am still working; I am just doing it in a very different way. That would be the first category of need that we can see carers are particularly strongly asking for. That would back and support the Carer Recognition Act and provide validity to that act and the ability for carers to enact their rights under that act. So that is category 1.

The next category that we talk about with carers is the right to have choice—choice over their time, choice over the way in which they live their life and choice over how they support themselves and the balance of care and work—and looking at how we provide carers with funds and opportunities for respite. Respite is not putting somebody in another facility for four weeks at a time; respite is the ability to have time in my day to nurture myself, nourish myself, look after my health and wellbeing and not just be focused on somebody else or work.

When you say, “What is the greatest impact of caring?” it is about that loss of time, and the loss of free time and free choice of time. How do we support carers with income support or with funding support to actually find time by paying for respite replacement care but also having the financial resourcing to then participate in hobbies or activities that provide them with meaningful engagement? We get requests for a broad range of things, such as: “Can I have some money to buy \$100 worth of wool, because what I enjoy doing is sitting and knitting?” or “Can I have a Netflix subscription, because when I get free time what I really like to do is watch trashy TV?” These are things that those of us that don’t provide care at the moment often take for granted. It is about having that unneeded time to do things that they enjoy and having the resources to support that. We are looking at that idea around how we allow carers to shape their own destiny, to look after their own mental health and wellbeing

and to have the time to do that and the resources to invest in that.

We also look at carers needing really practical supports. We know that we need more bereavement counselling for carers. We know that caring comes with a thousand cuts of grief and that it provides a particular bereavement that is not often recognised in mainstream service supports. We know that young carers need mentoring and mentoring supports. We know that young carers often lack an adult in their life who has the capacity and capability to invest in them—not that parents do not want to do that; parents do want to support their children and their families but often are not able to do things like driving lessons or the driving hours or take their child to taekwondo or whatever it might be. We think young carers, in particular, would benefit from a mentoring program that enables them to have connection with adults who can invest unconditionally in them and who can be there to support them and be engaged in the things of meaning for young carers.

Those are some of the big things, but Jess and I talk a lot about the fact that it is really the small things in life. Why do we not have an express lane at *Skyfire* so that carers can actually get some food and a drink and do not have to stand in line? Standing in line with people who cannot stand up for long means they cannot participate; they cannot turn up; they cannot be there. Having parking that works is another thing. Another example is having sensory spaces in first-aid tents so that I can have a space to regulate my person and participate in normal community life. Having workplaces that understand my role, understand what caring is, and that have flexibility and creativity to allow me to incorporate my caring role and my work so that I do not have to choose between the two is another important thing.

**MS ORR:** I do not know if you heard any of the previous witnesses, but I want to pick up on this theme that is coming through about unpaid work, care work and volunteer work and how they have all got their differences and their nuances. This afternoon one witness talked about when you stop caring and not necessarily wanting to stop caring. People say, “Oh, yes; carers contribute all this stuff and it is unpaid,” but it has a figure that goes with it and it would cost the economy if they were not doing it. Playing devil’s advocate, you could simply say, “Why don’t we provide that service?” But do carers want to stop caring or do they want the support to do the caring?

**Ms Kelly:** I had a conversation with a carer this morning who articulated something beautifully that I am going to steal from her and articulate here. She said, “I am full of capability. I have the capability I need to live my life and to be great at my life. It is the capacity that I do not often have.” I thought it was a beautiful way of describing care. What she was articulating was: “I do not want to give up my caring, but I also do not want to have to choose between caring and having income. I do not want to have to choose between caring and my health and caring and my wellbeing. I have got the capability to be an adult and to look after all those things, but my caring role takes away my capacity to balance all of it”—which is the stuff we talk about with time as well.

So, no; the majority of carers—not all, but the vast majority—are not saying that they want to relinquish their care and their caring role. But they are saying, “I need help to do this. I need help to sustain it and I need help to maintain it and I also need to have



great facilities and options if I cannot do it any longer.” There are carers that will continue the caring role for longer than they may want because there is not an alternative that suits them or that they find suitable for the person they care for.

**MS ORR:** So, just to clarify: it is not as simple as saying, “The care work is being done in place of paid work and therefore we just need to make it a paid role.” It is actually far more nuanced than that.

**MISS NUTTALL:** When you talked about low community awareness and self-identification rates for young carers, you mentioned that that usually stops young carers from getting the support they need. Are there any community information campaigns and recognition that focus on young carers? If not, would community campaigns be effective in getting young carers more support?

**Ms Kelly:** I think it probably depends on what age we are referring to as “young carers”. The reason I am smoking a little bit is that one of my greatest frustrations in life is that maybe 15 years ago I was involved in a campaign to have whether you are a young carer included in school enrolment forms. We are the only jurisdiction that achieved that. When you enrol your child in school you are asked, “Is this young person providing a care role in your family?” Yet, we do not use that information to then ensure that young people coming through our school system are identified and supported.

We continue to say that what we need young people to do is reach out for help; yet it is against the nature of a young person to do that. What we are not doing is saying, “Actually, we can see you and we are going to be the adult here and come and offer you help and support.” So my short answer is: no, I do not think a community campaign would necessarily work. I think a community campaign increases the community’s awareness that there are young people in families who provide care. But I do not think it increases young people’s connection to support. Young carers—a bit like adult carers, for that matter—intersect with a range of spaces in community and are never seen. Then we run a campaign and say, “Please put your hand up,” instead of saying, “How about we see you in the spaces where you already are? How about we reach out to you in the spaces that you already are? How about we recognise you there?”

**MISS NUTTALL:** What does good support look like for young carers, say, in school? Does it look like dedicated carers leave on the explained absence forms? Does it look like more flexible study hours or expectations of homework, especially in the later years?

**Ms Kelly:** Yes; all of those things. It is about seeing young carers as individuals and recognising that what they share is additional adult responsibilities and that what they need is assistance with that. What they often need is the opportunity to just be a kid, to just participate with their friends in things that their friends are doing, to have a moment where they are not having to be the adult and where they are getting the support to ensure that they are actually able to identify their goals and their dreams for their life and have the support to achieve those.

It is all those practical things like absentee records, adjustments with homework and

schoolwork et cetera but it is also about recognition, being seen. It is about somebody else saying, “How about I do the shopping list for Mum,” or “Can I help pay the bill”—not with the money but just the actual act of paying the bill—“so that you can go and have your lunch with your mates?”

**MISS NUTTALL:** Your first recommendation was that the ACT government make use of data available from Carers Australia and other national data sources to determine a value figure of the economic contribution of carers. What would it mean to Carers ACT for the ACT government to effectively use this data? Would that help with recognition?

**Ms Kelly:** I think our recommendation was about it not being our role to identify what the economic contribution of carers is. Under the terms of reference, there was a question around what the economic contribution of unpaid care is. We were responding by saying that there is data that is available in that space and that you, as government, have access to economists far more easily than we do to analyse that data. It is really challenging in the ACT, because of our size, to pull that sort of data and to do that sort of analysis. I guess it was our cheeky way of saying, “Thanks for the question, but this is not our question to answer.” We know the economic value is huge, and it is more than just the cost of replacement care.

**Miss Johnson:** I also want to point out that the new Survey of Disability, Ageing and Caring comes out tomorrow. Please refer to that when you are looking at the contribution of carers, because we certainly will be.

**MS ORR:** I think we have covered the issue of trying to unpack the difference between unpaid work, as far as being a volunteer or a carer or an unpaid worker goes. Do you have any final reflections that you would like to make on that from a carers perspective?

**Miss Johnson:** I look after my mum. I am fortunate enough that she is well enough that I can come to work most of the time. But I would not be able to be in paid employment without a workplace that allowed me that flexibility, that understood my caring role and my responsibilities and that offers me some additional carers leave. Carers ACT, obviously, have a very good insight into my responsibilities. As such, they are leading the way, leading by example. That is what we would expect the ACT public service to extend to carers as well—not that I am going to leave. However, it is about having that option, knowing that in the ACT most employers, if not all employers, have an understanding of the role of a carer. I do not want to be a full-time carer for my mum. I do not want to have to leave my profession. I love it. I do not want to take up full-time care. However, the option is nice.

**Ms Kelly:** The point I really want to make is that we need to differentiate between unpaid work and care. Unpaid work is a choice that people often make. It is about choosing to volunteer. It has a nourishing, nurturing impact. It helps me feel part of community. It builds my wellbeing and builds my sense of efficacy. Care is often not a choice. In fact, the majority of time, it is not a choice and it has a negative impact on my health, my wellbeing and my time. I think it is really important to differentiate in that way.

PROOF

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank you for appearing today and for taking the time to answer our questions. Hansard will provide you guys with a transcript from today's hearing. Feel free to cast your eyes over it and provide any feedback. I wish you a good afternoon.

**Ms Kelly:** Thank you very much.

**Miss Johnson:** Thank you.

**Short suspension.**

**KLEIN OAM, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ELISE**, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to the inquiry.

**Prof Klein:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** You have the pink privilege statement in front of you. I remind you of the obligations and protections afforded by parliamentary privilege. Could you tell us whether you agree with that privilege statement.

**Prof Klein:** I agree.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. Thank you very much. We will go straight to questions. Miss Nuttall, fire away.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Thank you very much. Referring to your submission, what does healthy and meaningful visibility of care for community, kin and country look like in the ACT? How do we bridge the gaps in understanding and broadening our understanding of care work?

**Prof Klein:** First, I want to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, on whose land we are meeting, and acknowledge all the First Nations women that contributed to the research which I have the privilege of sharing with the committee. I want to acknowledge the tireless and extraordinary unpaid work of Aboriginal women across the country and here in the ACT.

We talked to over a hundred women across the country, and one of the sites was here in the ACT. The research that we did follows on from Aunty June Oscar's work that was carried out at the Australian Human Rights Commission and the landmark report of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani project. We worked with her team on the piece of research we have presented to you. We were trying to do a couple of things. We were trying to understand what care meant, because, in Aunty June's work in Wiyi Yani U Thangani, care kept coming up in the yarnings she was having with First Nations women. We were trying to understand more about what care means. We were doing that, as well as trying to quantify the extraordinary amount of work that is done.

If you look at the ABS census, which is a very blunt measure of care and unpaid work, you will see that First Nations women, as a group, do more care across the course of their life than non-Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men. We were trying to understand what this was all about. That is why we talked to a whole lot of women. One of the big things that came out of that research—going to the context of your question—is that care is much more broadly defined than you often see in non-Indigenous policy. Over and over again, care of country, care of culture and care of community were also understood as care, on top of the more non-Indigenous ways in which we care, such as care of house, care of kids, care of people with disability and care of elders. That was a fundamental point.

One of the pieces that came from our research is the need for policy to be more

inclusive. We probably need to rethink the ways in which care is talked about to make sure that the ideas of First Nations women around care are not overlooked. If you are not even talking about them then you are not measuring them and you are not seeing them. Policy is completely missing a huge amount of unpaid care work that is being done, because of the complete mismatch in how we understand care.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Is this research across Australia the first of its kind?

**Prof Klein:** I think First Nations women have been saying this forever, so I do not want to say this is a first. This piece of research follows Aunty June's work. The report from Wiyi Yani U Thangani is groundbreaking. Our research followed that and tried to understand it a little bit more, particularly around the questions of care. The research employed a range of methods to quantify. You need new definitions and new measures of care that include care of country and care of culture.

The other part that we miss is all the work First Nations women do to mop up the mess of colonisation: the extraordinary trauma; the ways in which state institutions continue to create trauma; the poverty; the structural marginalisation. All of this creates extra work for Aboriginal women to deal with in terms of care. Our research is trying to quantify that. I would say the numbers that we have put forward are extremely conservative. There is probably a lot more.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Wow. Thank you.

**MS ORR:** Picking up on that, is it fair to say—from the evidence that you have provided on the consideration of unpaid work, care and volunteer work—that taking a culturally sensitive lens is important? We have heard evidence from other people today that it cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach; it is more nuanced than that. Is this one aspect that needs to be included in that nuance?

**Prof Klein:** I wonder whether it needs to be included or whether the ACT needs a separate First Nations care strategy. The framing is so specific. There is a lot of diversity in that, of course, but there is also a very specific way in which care is talked about, because of the deep challenges around First Nations women's care. Also, it is not a burden; it is something that is celebrated. It is something that is seen as strength, and it is what keeps communities and families together. In the research, women here in the ACT but also across the country talked about the extraordinary strength that care brings. It is a site of economic and social transformation. It is a paradigm shift. The language of inclusiveness worries me—what would be left behind if you tried to put it under non-Indigenous ideas. Having Aboriginal women lead and think through what that strategy could look like would be a much better way forward.

**THE CHAIR:** A substantive, Ms Orr?

**MS ORR:** I am happy for Laura to ask a question while I decide on which one to ask.

**MISS NUTTALL:** You mentioned Wiyi Yani U Thangani's change agenda. Could you walk us through the change agenda and what it would look like if we incorporated it properly and meaningfully into the ACT's wellbeing indicators?

**Prof Klein:** That is a conversation that is ongoing—it is new—but there are some major pieces linked to care that I can briefly outline. One is the paradigm shift in how care is understood. It is not just people focused; it is also about culture, care of country and communities more broadly, in a very rich way. Yes, it is care of elders; yes, it is care of families; yes, it is care of kids; but it is also way more expansive. In taking that expansive view, there is a real need for policy to change the way it speaks about care but also measures care. As I said, if you cannot see it, you cannot measure it, and then you do not even know it is there. The policy is completely missing that.

There is an important piece around decolonisation. Another key piece around the research, but also Aunty June's work, is how damaging state institutions, even in the name of care, are for Aboriginal women. There is a real need to support Aboriginal-controlled organisations and Aboriginal grassroots organisations because they are the ones that are doing a lot of the heavy lifting. There is a huge range. I am sure you are all aware that the ACT is very wealthy but has extremely high rates of Aboriginal child removals. There is the trauma and the damage that does to families. Who is picking up the pieces? That is unpaid work. Aboriginal care is mopping up that mess.

When First Nations people go to hospital and are faced with structural racism, they avoid going to those places. Where are those people going? The Aboriginal community and First Nations women are again bridging that gap. There is the question about what decolonisation means, but we also need to support Aboriginal-controlled organisations and grassroots organisations in very deep and well-resourced ways.

The other thing I will say is that the research that we did started to put a dollar value on the extraordinary amount of work that is being done. Again, I think it is a very conservative value. Because a lot of the extra unpaid work that Aboriginal women are doing is because of colonisation, there is a need for a paradigm shift in policy. It is not just about funding services; it is also about funding what is owed to Aboriginal women because of the extra work they have to do, because of historic colonial policies and contemporary colonial policies.

**MS ORR:** That answered my second question.

**MISS NUTTALL:** One of your recommendations talks about investing more in the First Nations-led care sector. How underinvested is that care sector now? Do we even have the right system infrastructure in place?

**Prof Klein:** I do not think so. Thinking about the ACT and the kind of evidence that was generated in the research but also more broadly, there is a deep feeling that Aboriginal-controlled organisations have to work under broader, non-Indigenous ideas of care and also organisations of care. Deeply funding and properly funding Aboriginal-controlled organisations at the community level is essential. It is also about building capacity. People are so stretched. My colleagues who were meant to be here today could not be here because they had to do a funding proposal. People have to make really tough choices, as well as deal with their own care obligations.

This is another important piece of the research: First Nations women in paid

employment often do that employment as a way to subsidise. What they are really doing is the unpaid care. They try their best to work in the jobs while subsidising all their obligations and working beyond the paid space. Also, in the paid space they are often asked to do extra work because they are First Nations women. So a massive cultural load is put on them. Employers do not understand that. It is hard to distinguish between where paid work starts and where it stops, because of that blurring situation.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Are you happy to very briefly expand on the concept of the cultural load? How would you explain that?

**Prof Klein:** In a job description, there are certain things that you are employed to do, but often First Nations women will end up in the position of being asked to do extra stuff—“Can you come to the Reconciliation Action Plan discussion?” A lot of First Nations women are in paid community care roles—they are working for Aboriginal organisations, health organisations or child support organisations—and their community knows that they are in those roles and requires all sorts of support and help. There is all the extra work that comes with that that is not paid and is not in their job description.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Thank you. Your submission recommends providing supports for intimate time on country. Are we currently providing this support at all in any organisations that are not Aboriginal-led organisations?

**Prof Klein:** I actually do not know—not that I have come across. I will just say that eligibility for the carer payment cuts out so many Aboriginal women who are carers. A lot of people find themselves on social security payments, which, as we know, are extremely harsh, very punitive and very low. The amount of money that you get is extremely low, so people find themselves around the poverty line or under it. I just want to say that that structure of payment is not working for Aboriginal women.

**MISS NUTTALL:** That is quite shocking to hear, to be honest.

**Prof Klein:** Mutual obligations do not see unpaid care as work, so women who are caring are being punished for doing that work. Their care is not seen in mutual obligations and is not acknowledged as work, and therefore they are put on work for the dole, CDP or whatever it is. They are punished for doing that work, because it is not seen as work.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Wow. With a minute to go, do you have any closing remarks or are there particular things that we have not talked about yet?

**Prof Klein:** There are my colleagues at the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Gender Justice Institute at the ANU. It is new. I really encourage the ACT policy landscape to engage with this wonderful institute. It is really exciting, and we are really lucky to have it in the ACT. Their change agenda is deep and it is unfolding. It would be great to stay in conversation and keep that connection. I think that would be good.

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, we would like to thank you for coming along today and answering some questions.

PROOF

**Prof Klein:** A pleasure.

**THE CHAIR:** You will be provided with a transcript of today's hearing, so please feel free to cast your eyes over that and provide any feedback. As I understand it, no questions were taken on notice. We wish you a good afternoon.

**Hearing suspended from 3.20 to 3.45 pm.**



**STRAZDINS, DR LYNDALL**, ANU College of Health and Medicine, Australian National University

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon and welcome to what is our final session for today, on unpaid work. What I will get you to do now is to state that you have read the pink privilege statement and that you agree to those conditions.

**Dr Strazdins:** Yes, I agree to tell the truth.

**THE CHAIR:** The whole truth and nothing but the truth!

**Dr Strazdins:** Nothing but the truth.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to remind you that the hearing today is being broadcast and recorded and will be published. Without any further ado, we will go straight into questions, if you are happy to do so.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Getting right into the meat of it! Given how much we have recognised care work as real work, do you think there is a case for payment of care work, in recognition that it profoundly benefits the economy, let alone improves wellbeing?

**Dr Strazdins:** I think that is a really hard question and has a complicated answer. My first response is: absolutely, we should value the work that keeps the whole society running. It gives us our future, through children, and looks after us when we are sick or unwell and older—all those things. There is no economy without that work. Then there are the numerous kinds of efforts and care put into building community. Again, there is no economy without community. It seems to me that we have arbitrarily separated those activities. I do not think it means, though, that everything has to be paid to value things. I guess it comes back to discerning what things should be paid and what things should not be paid.

I think, personally, that there are some things people do not want to commodify. It becomes complicated when you start commodifying things like gifts of love. It is quite a complicated thing to start commodifying those sort of actions without changing them. What I am saying is that there is a lot to think about in the question you are asking, which really does need to be worked through before arriving at a yes or no answer to it.

In a way, a lot of the unpaid work, and perhaps some paid work, is motivated by questions of love, certainly in families. I am a clinical psychologist, as well as a professor. I am an academic. In my work with families, as an academic but also as a clinician, parents just want to have more time to do the care they want to do. This comes through in the research as well. I am also one of the academics who designed the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, which is that huge cohort study which started 20 years ago—so we will all be retired, I think, before it finishes. It has followed families from birth to young people now. What we see is an enormous struggle with a lot of families around how to find the time to be the parents and carers and partners they want to be.

So it may not be that the valuing is in giving money. It may be that the valuing is in giving time to unpaid work and recognising that people need to have the sufficient time resources to do it, as well as the financial resources to do it. I am sorry if I am not giving you a nice, tidy answer to that, but I think it is a complicated question.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I think it is a great answer to a question with a lot to unpack.

**MS ORR:** In reading through your submission, it seemed to be very much focused on additional hours on top of paid work. So the unpaid work is unpaid overtime as such. One of the things that we have had come up quite a bit is unpaid work that is not necessarily replacing paid positions. It might be done through a volunteer or it might be done through a caring responsibility, for lack of a better way of putting it. But it is not necessarily replacing a paid position or doing additional hours. I was hoping to seek your views on the scenarios where it is looking at, say, a volunteering position or a caring role—moving away from this idea of overtime—just to get a better understanding of some of the issues and insights you might have around that.

**Dr Strazdins:** I am a little bit confused in answering you, so you might have to help with that—

**MS ORR:** That is fine; yes.

**Dr Strazdins:** A lot of volunteering actually is done by parents. As far as I know, they are one of the highest rates of volunteer groups. They do their volunteering as part of their caregiving for kids. For them, that is another time demand on top of their paid work and all the other stuff they do. We have a lot of parents who, for example, volunteer in school activities and things like that. We are actually quite unusual. We hosted some Finnish scholars who are experts in early childhood education, and they were like, “Wow! Australian parents do so much volunteering at schools. It is remarkable. We do not do that in Finland.” The reason they do not do it in Finland is that both parents are working full time and flat out. What happens is that it is usually the mothers who are part time who are doing all the volunteering in the schools. In my mind, they are not easily separated: volunteering, paid work and unpaid work. I think they are part of a whole ecosystem.

**MS ORR:** So is it fair to say that you treat them all as work; that you do not distinguish between the different types?

**Dr Strazdins:** No. I think they are different types, and they have different motivations. Retired people, for example, are not often in paid work but they do more volunteering work. Or people do volunteering as a pathway to employment. What I am saying is that I do not think volunteering is over here when it comes to paid work and unpaid work. I think it feeds into life cycles, where people combine it with their paid and unpaid work. And then there are times when people do it as another thing again—a contribution. I do know that, when people are asked about volunteering, a lot of the reason they give is that they just do not feel they have enough time. That is a reason—not the only reason—that people do not volunteer.

**MS ORR:** Can I just clarify? From reading through your submission, is it fair to say that it is very much worked on that overtime of paid work? It is not taking into

consideration other forms of unpaid work?

**Dr Strazdins:** You are right. Yes; absolutely. So really my submission goes back to your terms of reference:

3. the dynamic between unpaid and paid work, including: a. how participation in one affects the other ...

That has been my work for the last 20 years and it has really shown that they profoundly affect each other. To work with unpaid work—not necessarily volunteering; I cannot comment on that—the household work and the care work, they are very intermeshed as activities. As one goes up, the other goes down. So it seems to me that, in order to make space for unpaid work and support it, there needs to be corresponding attention to: how do we do that? One piece of that puzzle is: how do we loosen up that very tight connection now between paid and unpaid work, which is driving the gender patterns that we see in all the timely surveys? So that is one piece of it.

**MS ORR:** Yes. That is getting to the crux of where I was going. I was just trying to understand where it fits in all these different concepts we have had thrown around today and the angle that it comes in at.

**Dr Strazdins:** Yes. Unpaid work is really important. I also think that, in a deeper sense, it shows up in paid work as well. I am an academic, and what gets rewarded are some activities. But activities, for example, where people support students, support their colleagues and give service, are not necessarily as rewarded. There is this kind of flavour of devaluing that work, even while it is so important for the functioning of the organisation. There is, if you like, that blurriness between what constitutes paid and unpaid showing up, even in a job, because it is sitting on a whole lot of values about what matters and what does not matter, and also whose work matters and whose work does not matter. Those assumptions drive a lot of the explicit or implicit rewarding. Money is one of them, but there are other rewards.

**MS ORR:** Going back to this relationship and the influence that paid work and unpaid work have on each other—I think you touched on it—you said that the more paid work you do, the less unpaid work you do. Apart from that, are there any other insights you could give to the relationship between the two, from your research?

**Dr Strazdins:** Yes. Your partner's paid work influences your unpaid work as well. It is a household affair. If you are in a household where your partner is doing very long hours, your unpaid work generally goes up, especially for a woman. For a man, it is much rarer for a woman to be doing long hours, but the corresponding change in his family work is much weaker.

**MISS NUTTALL:** When we are starting to pull that thread then, understanding that there are some pretty substantial gender imbalances with the presumption and reality of the unpaid care work that you are doing, specifically domestic and caring work, what would be the thread we pull first to even those scales, to enable everyone to have, like you said, the valuable thing, which is time? I know your submission recommended capping long work hours. Does it also look like having measures in

place to incentivise men in caring roles?

**Dr Strazdins:** Yes. Yes, it is all of the above. In a paper I had rejected, one of the reviewers said, “You are talking a lot about how to address work hours, but what about how to improve involvement in unpaid hours?” They were dead right. That has to happen as well. That is amenable to government policy.

I think the Icelandic example, with their paid parental leave scheme, is a nice one to see how it incentivised unpaid work. Iceland is weird because it is little. It is like the ACT. In fact, it is pretty similar in size and population, and possibly even education level. I am not sure about that. Anyway, as a scale, it is very similar to the ACT. Basically, when they did an intervention, it could affect the entire country because it was so small.

The intervention was to make sure that there was a significant “use it or lose it” incentive for men to stay at home with their babies at pretty much full pay. They valued that time for men and women by reimbursing it, not at the minimum wage but at full pay. Because it was so desirable, that was an incentive. They found that, over time, workplaces and all of the other Icelandic men said, “Of course you are going to take your paid parental leave, aren’t you, because everyone else is?” So the culture changed to the expectation that of course you would. That meant any other penalties that men were experiencing in the workplace started to disappear. It had this give and take in it.

It took some time. It was not an immediate thing, but it grew into a culture change piece that changed behaviour at home and in the workplace. They have some evidence showing that work hours changed. Men pulled their hours back. Women’s hours crept back up, and time at home changed. It was really strategic interventions on both those sides that enabled things to start to shift.

**MISS NUTTALL:** I am curious: when you looked at the gendered aspects, did you examine any same-sex or queer relationships to test gender trends, without looking at the standard sort of heterosexual couple?

**Dr Strazdins:** Yes. It is a great question. Most of the big models that I run are on large datasets, and we just do not have enough in those groups to run the models. They require large numbers. There is a problem, in that what I am talking about, in terms of the research, is entirely based on heterosexual households, in the dynamic I am describing. There is, though, a bit of research out there; it is mostly qualitative, but there is some quantitative research on this.

There are two things that are really interesting about non-heterosexual couples and how they share paid and unpaid work. The first is that they tend to negotiate it much more. There is less assumption. They still have the same problems, because they still only have 24 hours in a day, so they still have to figure out how they are going to do this. You still see often that there are real work and family conflicts for those couples. They are not immune to the problem, but they may negotiate differently around it and they do not have the same automatic assumptions about how it will play out. Again, it comes back to the interplay between beliefs and feasibility. You can have all the belief in the world, but if it is not feasible you do not do it. Also, beliefs may mean

that some people are more or less inclined to take more or less different feasible options.

There is very good research, a really beautiful paper, which I am happy to send to the committee, which did an experiment asking couples, or young people who are expecting to have families and to work, how they would share the paid and unpaid work. This was a US study. The women said, "I hope my partner shares it with me." The men said, "Probably I will not. I will probably be able to do more of the paid work and probably she will have to take some time off." The women said, "You know, in reality, probably I will have to do this and have to do that." Then they changed the scenario and gave them a different workplace where there were much more feasible options for both of them to take time off and not be penalised. They saw that those couples, those men and women, started to then become much more egalitarian in their gender views—

**MISS NUTTALL:** Wow!

**Dr Strazdins:** If you had just asked them, you would have thought they were a bit gender stereotyped, particularly the men. But when they realised what was more feasible and they were not going to be penalised, they actually changed their apparent gender stereotypes to being more egalitarian because they saw it as a feasible option. So it is really important to work with what people think is right and appropriate and also what people can do, and they change each other.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Wow!

**Dr Strazdins:** I am very happy to dig up that. It is an American study. It is a really good paper, if you want that.

**MS ORR:** Just picking up on that and going back to the idea of that relationship between paid and unpaid work, in your research and in your studies, have you had any evidence of what people do with their time when the paid work reduces?

**Dr Strazdins:** There is a pretty big amount of literature on reduced work hours, which I think you covered in your last inquiry—

**MS ORR:** Yes, a little bit.

**Dr Strazdins:** That literature suggests that people exercised more and reported less work and family conflict. On the other hand, when France reduced its work hours the uptake of care by men was minimal. So I think it is patchy as to what the behaviour change looks like. It needs to be backed up with a few other incentives to balance it.

**MS ORR:** I think it is applying a care lens to work and unpaid care work within the family home—if my assumption is correct. I think that is where that was going. We have had a number of witnesses today who have raised that people say they would volunteer or would get more involved in community activities and so forth, but they are time poor, so they cannot do it. Usually, work is cited as the main stress. Moving away from the idea of delivering care to the idea of doing other unpaid work, such as volunteering, is there anything in your research or knowledge that would indicate

that—as has been put to us colloquially—people would do more volunteering and would do more community hours if they did not have as much paid work restriction?

**Dr Strazdins:** I think that is a great experiment. I do not know that there is good research on that. I know that there is the potential for people to not use that extra time for other activities. On the other hand, let me cite one study that I am aware of that I think is really interesting. It is not quite volunteering. It is a study on parenting, with at-risk parents. There is about a 75 per cent drop-out rate in these sorts of programs because they are the most hard to reach groups, but they are also the most important groups to reach in order to have preventative strategies so that they parent appropriately, avoiding domestic violence and child abuse.

One study said, “Right; so what stops parents coming? Let’s see. It is because it costs them and they are poor. And it takes time and they do not have that either.” So they set up the intervention to enable the parents by providing child care on site. They cooked a meal so that they did not have to cook any food. They ran the parenting programs while they looked after the other kids, and then the parents went home and went to bed. They had a huge surge in retention rates in that project, compared to others. When people were offered free time in a structured way, they used it for something really important like that. I accept that there will be some people who will not and there will be some people who will. The design of that policy would be really important. I think it would be a very good piece of research to do, to actually follow people if there was a reduced hours intervention, to see then who changed and what they changed to.

**THE CHAIR:** That brings us to the end of today’s hearing. On behalf of the committee, we thank you and all the witnesses who appeared before us today. You will be provided with a transcript of your session. If you are happy to cast your eyes over it and provide any feedback back to Hansard, that would be great. I do not think there were any questions taken on notice from your session today. Thank you for coming along. If members have any questions they would like to submit, please get them to the secretariat within five working days. The hearing is now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 4.08 pm.**