

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

THE HON JULIA GILLARD AC, Commissioner

THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO EARLY CHILD EDUCATION AND CARE

**MONDAY, 22 MAY 2023
AT 03.30 PM**

This transcript is intended as a guide only and as an aide memoire with respect to the audio-visual record, which constitutes the official record of the hearing on 22 May 2023

SARAH ATTAR, Counsel Assisting

COMMISSIONER

We will recommence for our afternoon session. Counsel Assisting.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Thank you. I call Commissioner Lawrie.

< COMMISSIONER LAWRIE AFFIRMED

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Thank you, Commissioner. In October 2018, were you appointed as inaugural Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in South Australia?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yes, that's correct. And I started in the role December 2018.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And you hold a degree in social work I believe?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yes, I do, attained in 1990.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And you have had a broad career working across child protection work and also in relation to Aboriginal foster care services.

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yes, in my, particularly in my early career, with extensive background in also health and justice and education.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And for four years, I believe you held the role of Aboriginal Justice Director within the Attorney General's Department in South Australia.

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yes, I did, leading the Aboriginal Justice Community Development Initiative and Aboriginal Justice Policy.

COUNSEL ASSSITING

And for 10 years you held the role of SA Health, Aboriginal Health Branch Director. Is that right?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

That's correct, and there was a restructure, but initially the role was Executive Director, with my role participating on the health portfolio executive reporting directly to the Chief Executive.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And for two and a half years, I believe you also held a role within the Education Department as Director of Aboriginal Education.

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yes, that's correct. Before I took on this role as Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.

COUNSEL ASSSITING

And Commissioner, I know that you are well aware with the terms of reference for this Royal Commission and you've already provided many insights to us, but we wanted to invite you today to help us understand how best to embed indigenous voices into service provision within the first thousand days. And also when it comes to looking at what quality preschool looks like for three and four year olds, particularly for three and four year old Aboriginal children. And there's a wealth of information that you can bring to the table. I wonder if you might start by helping us to understand a really important concept and that is cultural safety.

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Cultural safety is a concept, that should not be confused with cultural awareness, should not be confused with developing, you know, cultural awareness training. Cultural safety is pretty much about how a service system is experienced by, in this regard by Aboriginal children and their families and cultural safety is about knowing that you can access a service without your race, your cultural context, not being discriminated against. You don't experience, well there are things in place that mitigate any prejudice that you might experience. Cultural safety is supported by a culturally capable workforce as well, and ensuring that there are also policies and procedures and practises in place within that service system that enable a much more inclusive provision or delivery of services, in this case for Aboriginal children and their families.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

What does a culturally safe program look like for children in the early years, well let's stick with preschool for example, what does a culturally safe preschool program look like?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Well, first of all, it should see the child as an Aboriginal child with a culture and a heritage and identity, and with family and community are wrapped around it, and a child belonging to country. And that means for the child that they're, that they're able to participate in their own learning and development by people who provide what I would say quality cultural education for the child, which includes and supports engagement of their family and of their culture and their community. So cultural safety in that regard then ensures that the centre builds its philosophy, well it builds its whole service on the philosophy of the Aboriginal child's culture, their belonging and identity. So if you take for an example what that looks like for a centre that is Aboriginal specific and what we often term as Aboriginal community controlled, or a service, which is for whole of population, the way in which that is delivered will look somewhat different. So a culturally safe service in terms of an Aboriginal community controlled children's service will be one where not only is there is an Aboriginal workforce, but its governance includes Aboriginal people. Their leadership includes Aboriginal people and their management and the educators are of Aboriginal heritage so that the centre will have things about it, not just built into the bricks and mortar of it that speak about it exuding culture. That the way in which teaching practises that enable the child to see before them educators that not only come from their community, that is probably known to them and their family, but that the education is also about all those things that help with brain development, that stem from culture. And those are the things that I see happening in Aboriginal community controlled, all different forms of child and family centres that are there specifically to engage Aboriginal children and their families and, you know, things like children learning language, learning songs in language, seeing that the children around them are of their same cultural background. Myself, I have gone out of my way, I drive kilometres out of my way every morning before I go to work to take my little girl, and all my sons before that, to an Aboriginal children's centre for the very point that it is my preference, it is where my little girl and my sons have been able to grow and develop strong and happy in their cultural identity and to be confident little learners, and strong and proud of who they are in their learning and development. So, for those centres that aren't Aboriginal community controlled, but are therefore a whole of population - what culturally safe looks like is always a challenge. And it is always a challenge because I've heard directly from children and families in my role as Aboriginal children's commissioner about what makes a difference in being able to access much needed services in the early childhood space. And that means for our children and our families that we know from attendance rates and not that they, they are entirely disaggregated, but anecdotally, there are issues about attendance because engagement is an issue for our children and our families. There is much fear about what whole of population, what we deem mainstream, early childhood services, have in terms of our Aboriginal families. One needs only to understand the history of forced removals, but also what that looks like today. And currently with our concerns in the care and protection space for our Aboriginal children and families, most of the notifications that concern children in South Australia and in particularly our Aboriginal children and families comes from educators. And so

there is a mistrust of those services, when it's really an important part of a child's opportunity, it provides all those things that families need. We understand that in those mainstream children's services that having the ability to engage our children and our families like we do with public education as an institution in itself, there are funding formulas in place that enable the recruitment of an Aboriginal workforce across our education system that does not apply to, you know, our preschools. If I could take the opportunity to say that it would be such an important, improvement to our service system in our early childhood to deploy such policy, in regards to Aboriginal children and you know, across, mainstream.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Is that the program you mentioned in your very helpful submission, whereby there's funding for up to 40 minutes a week for Aboriginal students enrolled in schooling to have time with an Aboriginal worker.

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

That's right. And so there's an expectation, an unfair expectation that, some of the, so in terms of workload that some of the Aboriginal community engagement officers across primary schools extend their roles into preschools, particularly if it's a feeder.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And that's never been trialled within an early learning space?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

I don't believe it has. But there are some examples of where it is happening in an unwritten form where, because of relationships, and that's really important to stress that in any quality, you know, early education centre, early learning centre for children, particularly Aboriginal children, that the relationship with the educator, the carer with their child and their family is critical to engagement, but also about, what that means in terms of how we provide direct support to the child and their family. And that doesn't happen to the extent of how it occurs in mainstream children centres in comparison to Aboriginal community controlled childhood centres.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

How do we start to, assuming there may always be a role for what you've termed mainstream services alongside of services that offer a provision of preschool controlled and directed by Aboriginal people. But if we look at the ones you've called mainstream, how do we start to try and build trust?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

An Aboriginal workforce. And that's why I made the comment that the way in which resources are flowing into schools, public education schools should reach out into kindergartens, into pre schools, for our Aboriginal children. And it was interesting to note in my time in education that whilst the policy was already in place that enabled Aboriginal three year olds to access preschools, that that really important resource could have enabled greater attendance rates. While that certainly is anecdotal data we sort of know that enrolments are good, but attendance was questionable in terms of making good value and good use of the policy already before the Aboriginal community in relation to three year olds.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And certainly the Commission has noted the recommendations around better data collection for attendance, as opposed to actual enrolments. If we look at this very difficult subject of trust and intergenerational issues that are still with us every day, what can, we will come back to Aboriginal workforce in a moment because it's very important, but what can a non Aboriginal workforce do to try and help build trust? Do you have any views about whether we are properly utilising proper training as part of what early educators or teachers are learning, or whether we should be doing it on the job? Are there insights that you have in that regard?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

I think there are a whole range of things that need to be improved in the curriculum but also in the, I guess the workforce by and large. There's not much for what I understand in house training for educators around being much more responsive to Aboriginal children and their families. So, but also having an understanding that quality, you know, education and care in early childhood and learning centres, early childhood, education and learning centres, warrants a greater focus on how you actually, build inclusive, so for the Aboriginal child, and I have to say this, that you can't speak about the child without their family. And children can't get to a centre unless the family enable that, but the system has to be enabling this. The centre has to be enabling and that whole mistrust and distrust of mainstream services, which, you know, those fears are really are absolutely real in terms of what our family's experience from not only intergenerational trauma, but the current experiences of child removal rates today and the system needs to do much more to build the knowledge base of the workforce, but have an Aboriginal workforce in it. If there has to be a, what I would say, options in which families have before them Aboriginal community controlled centres, and some will definitely not have that option, because they might not be available in their geographical area, that transport would be an important way to actually facilitate that. But what happens is system puts up all sorts of rules about transport and transport that is delivered by the service system, ends up becoming a barrier for a large proportion of families.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Could you give us some examples of how you've seen that work? Obviously centres that you've used personally, and I don't, we don't need you to name any centres, but obviously

there are things they do very well, but what the real life examples around transport that, that we need to understand in other places?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Putting geographic boundaries in place about where the transport stops, the cost that actually is involved in running a transport service within a, within a facility will sort of determine the extent to which it travels to pick up children.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

The services that that you've used and others that you know have used successfully. What, what has been offered? Has it been that, that the service might fund?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yeah, the service has its own transport program in place and it's actually supported with the transport program and that helps a lot of families that would otherwise struggle with getting their child or children to the centre. But transport is a key determinant in many outcomes for disadvantaged families. And the truth is that we have a lot of families that are disadvantaged in terms of income, in terms of unemployment levels. But also those things that we take for granted, which is, coming from household where parents, one or more parents have had access to good education. So all those things come into play. But you made, you posed the question to me about what's needed for better opportunities through transport. It is usually the transport element that is a deal breaker families, particularly in areas where transport public, transport was hard to get to. But I have to always go back to the point about a welcoming environment in which the centre needs to pose itself to the family. And one that is got strong aspects of engagement and making families feel not only welcome, but they're not being judged and they're able to participate and support their child's participation in the children's centre without fear of being perhaps directed to a child protection response or a child protection agency in that regard. So, can you ask me the question again?

COUNSEL ASSISTING

No, no, that was an answer. I'm interested to come back to your insights in relation to workforce and how important it is for us to increase and improve representation. And I have read across submissions that within say the Department for Education, there's a very small representative of indigenous educators. What do you think would attract more people to take on diploma or certificate studies or other qualifications, what would, what would assist more indigenous people to pursue work within the early childhood sector?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yes. I can draw correlations to other professions which have been highly impactful in terms of increasing the Aboriginal workforce in a particular stream or industry, and that would be in health. So while there's a lot of effort applied to get our young people through higher

education, obviously all those pathways, but developing a scope of practise in an area that is unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is in itself, highly impactful. So, and I'm, I'm not aware of, so I won't pretend to speak about what is currently in place in the early childhood area, but what I can talk about what I do know of in health and what we're trying to do in the social welfare space, through the Safe and Supported National Action Plan. But most definitely there is the Aboriginal Health Worker Practitioner role, which has developed a scope of practise that enables for the Aboriginal person to bring not only clinical skills into the discipline, but bring their Aboriginal skills as a qualification into how you work in a clinical setting. Same as in education with the Aboriginal education worker scope of practise. That is a critical workforce stream and scope of practise from entry point to the more senior level that enables the deployment of an Aboriginal workforce across our public education system across our schools. And that has, that's recognised, but not a registered profession in itself. So in early childhood, I'm not sure what's there, but I would imagine that something like that would need to be examined as to how can, because we can put our Aboriginal people through, through a pipeline process to get qualifications in university or in training facilities to come out with qualifications in, you know, aligned to all other professional groups working in early childhood. But there's a lot to be said about developing scopes of practise that recognise Aboriginality, and all that comes with it as being an important way to uphold other mainstream qualifications and to develop the unique set of scope in that practise to have regard from what is important for anyone with an early career, an entry point cadetship, to those who would want to work through that particular stream and go into leadership and management and maybe to more senior roles in the early childhood space.

SARAH ATTAR

That model within health that you are speaking of how successful has that been as far as you understand in terms of encouraging a more representative workforce?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yep. Well, it's very successful in that it's actually a registered profession with the Australian Health Practitioners regulatory authority and there are two streams, the clinical and the community care. So it recognises, there is a, you know, RTOs that deliver the training. There are, there's a curriculum that's attached to the community care and the clinical practice. What more can I say? That it's an exemplar in this country in terms of what has been before us to not only develop culturally responsive health services. Not everyone wants to, you know, go through life and aspire. I mean, we want, we have high expectations of our children and our young people, contrary to what mainstream Australia thinks, but we have high expectations but not everyone wants to be a doctor, a school teacher and work in a mainstream setting. But our, our children and young people need to have, need to have choices and options and to actually work in fields where they know they can contribute and be the best they can be. And, so it is often a preference for our people to take up Aboriginal specific qualifications that really highlight and get them to undertake their skills built on their knowledge that comes from their own immersion in their identity and in their community. And you can get anyone, I shouldn't say anyone, you know, it's open to anyone to get a qualification at university with a, you know, a qualification in early childhood education and expect that person to be equipped to work with

Aboriginal children and their families. And to have that expectation, they know how to be inclusive and how to engage and bring them in and how to see that child and their family, with identity, with history, with heritage and with culture. And that that should be a centrepiece in the way in which the curriculum is delivered, which is a lot different to an Aboriginal person who has got those qualifications in this regard in early childhood education, but also have knowledge and skills about how you work with the child and with their family and you build their confidence and their learning about who they are as an Aboriginal child in the 21st century with 60,000 years of culture and history behind you. So, you know, if I can just cite that this stuff is already happening in Norway with, Sami. So, you know -

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Can you outline what that is for people who might not be familiar with that program?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

So Sami are the indigenous people of not only Norway, but parts of Russia and parts of Finland, I believe. And two other countries, I could be absolutely wrong, could be more than those countries. But essentially the Sami group that I'm referring to are the Sami group within Norway. They have a Sami university, they've built a curriculum in early child education. This program, this course, this qualification is only open to Sami. The idea is that Sami philosophy, ways and knowing and being and belonging is crucial in developing and sustaining Sami future and Sami culture going forward in the 21st century. And that whilst early child education is really important about economic outcomes, not only does it support disadvantaged children, but it's actually about sustaining culture as well and cultivating learning that enables all those things through mainstream pedagogy. It's built on Sami pedagogy that for Sami, all the learning activities and all the things that get the brain exercising for a child is built on Sami cultural activities. So everything from weaving to songs in language to learning about the Sami costume, about knowing the seasons, all those things are built and founded on Sami knowledge base. And it is really important to understand that that is giving the Sami child everything to do with who they are and their belonging and their identity, but also what the rest of society expects in building a little citizen to grow up strong in Norway.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Under that model, how is language deployed? Is there a mix of languages or is the pedagogy delivered in the native language? How does the model work?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yeah, I think much of it is in Sami language, and it is a pivotal, I guess a pivotal principle in the, the whole program. The fact that the university has developed the curriculum and it's, the reason I know about this is because I got to meet the people that are involved in the evaluation of this particular Sami early childhood program and at the WIPCE conference last year, which is the World's Indigenous People's Conference on Education. And that was held in Adelaide

last year, hosted by Tauondi College and the South Australian Aboriginal Education Training Consultative Committee.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

How would you like to see South Australia either try and emulate that or build some sort of similar model? What would it look like?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

I would've expected that that should already be in place in areas like the APY lands, where you get a hundred percent of Aboriginal children. It's, you know, on Aboriginal lands, it is predominantly Aboriginal people on traditional lands. And, but what we have instead is what I would term big white models being planted in very strong first nations communities, and trying to bolt on bits and pieces of Aboriginal cultural aspects to what is really a non-Aboriginal infrastructure and curriculum to say the least. I've just got to say this before I lose my train of thought on this is with the fact that there should be choices for our families, but in remote areas, such as the APY lands, it is all Aboriginal there, but the education system and the early childhood system is still part of the public education system, but at the same time, there needs to be, and these are my views, that where there is opportunity to bring things back and centre them on Aboriginal ways and knowing particularly through pedagogy, that that is so important to building strong Aboriginal children in themselves, into their identity. The fact that South Australia struggles with its public education system to deliver bilingual education upon the APY lands speaks volumes about what you can expect in early childhood education settings. So I know there is a real sense of pride in their communities. So that's a strength in itself. But when we look internationally as to what's happening in other first nations communities, that we have an opportunity here in South Australia to garner what is going on in territories like Sami country. I had the good fortune of being in Cranbrook a few years ago, which is in British Columbia and it's a remote outpost. I visited a first nation's early childhood centre, it's a nest. And what really struck me about that particular centre was the centring of culture for the child and the family. So at any time a child could engage with an elder within the centre who for all intents and purposes was there every day, as part of the family around the child. It was this whole notion that we grow up our children with our families and our families provide and our kinship systems, which is more than your blood ties, important people in your, in your community that have through cultural aspects, have a relationship with your, with your family and with your community. But that the role that our elders have with our children is really important in passing and transferring knowledge. Lots has gotten in the way of our knowledge transferred to our children and young people in terms of building cultural knowledge from the infant to the young adult and how we then as young adults pass onto our children and our young people. That particular centre for me was an exemplar as to the engagement of community elders in playing a role in delivering quality cultural education, to Aboriginal children.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Is that deployed in any of the, you've mentioned in your written submission a couple of centres that you know of where there is this a really strong cultural presence and feeling of safety. Is there anything like that happening in South Australia anywhere?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Can you ask that question in different terms?

COUNSEL ASSISTING

In terms of embedding elders, bringing in elders into early childhood learning in the centre you were lucky enough to visit?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

Yes, I believe, I think, well, I shouldn't say I think, I've seen it. For example, in Port Lincoln where there's an elder that plays a very important role within the centre, imparting knowledge about language, imparting knowledge about country and history. The fact is that when our children and our families go to the centres that our Aboriginal community controlled, they see not only just their child going to a centre and engaging with other children and engaging in their learning and development, but those mothers, those grandmothers, those, you know, parents, they see other Aboriginal families and it's an opportunity to connect. It's socialising, but it's more than socialising. You get to learn about other things that are happening. You keep your community connections and the way in which you relate to each other ongoing and it's quite fluid in the way in which that happens. You don't get that in a mainstream centre where you already feel where you're being judged, where you're already feeling that there might be a potential for someone to report you because you might not have the right clothes on. You might not have your child with the right clothes on etc. So, cultural, were you asking me a question about cultural safety or about safety in terms of, I just want clarity, in terms of child protection.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I meant more in the context of being culturally safe as we started speaking about, but I do know in your submission you also make some very interesting points that perhaps we can discuss today too, about where we facilitate contact with child protection and families so that it does feel safer. Is there anything that you'd like to say about the role that early education and care can play in making physical spaces more safe and friendly for those sorts of processes? When comes to dealing with child protection?

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

The early years of any child is really important. So the relationship that those particular centres have with the Aboriginal community is really important. And I've heard firsthand from, from

Aboriginal children, young people, and Aboriginal families about the importance of areas which help navigate, where they get help in navigating through the myriad services, with the complexity of issues that they might be confronted with. We have children that in terms of child protection, one can then expect that, there are a number of children that need extra help and extra services. And how can a children's centre or a child and family centre, an early learning centre can help that for an Aboriginal child and their family is really about how you actually link in with other services, that comes with engagement, that comes with knowing and understanding how you actually work in a mindset that is actually about early intervention and about early help without putting fear into the family, without marginalising the experience of the family and understanding that getting in early is a really constructive way of supporting better outcomes for the child and their family. What often happens is that the system, and that includes the early, you know, early childhood education system, often works around the child and their family. And we see that with reports. So rather than actually saying, you know, hey, there's a, we've noticed a developmental issue with your child. So what happens then is if, if there's any, concerns, the way in which it's approached is problematic. And that problematic approach is, like I said, in reports we made without even engaging the family. There's reluctance, because to actually engage with our mob is, is skill that our mob have. And, but also how you actually teach that in a professional, that's in the early education space is one that is requires considered, consideration in how you do that. Because it's more than just a textbooks exercise, it takes experience and, as well. And working alongside Aboriginal people who know how to do that is often a really good way of upskilling others around you to be able to engage positively with families who might need extra help with their children. Having a skilled workforce is really important. And I, you know, want to go back to the fact that we need to understand how working with allied health professionals is really important, and engaging with our Aboriginal community controlled health sector in doing that, cause they already provide a number of services to our Aboriginal families. How we make that connection is really important. And some of our, yeah, early childhood services do great work in that space in joined up work with our Aboriginal health services, with our under fives ear health checks. You know, the fact remains though we have to grow the number of our Aboriginal early childhood centres. There's a lot of work to be done in optimising our mainstream services to be more inclusive, more engaging, more culturally respectful, more culturally safe. But we also need to, we don't have enough Aboriginal children's centres in South Australia. And I believe, there have been a number of representations about that need even pre dating, this Royal Commission about the importance of increasing the number of Aboriginal children's centres, for a whole, you know, raft of, reasons. I don't know whether I answered the question.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I'm going to let the Commissioner have the rest of the time.

COMMISSIONER

Sure. Thank you. We're out here today in Adelaide's North taking specific evidence here because you know, the statistics tell us that, you know, given the population growth out here, disproportionately the children we are talking about are going to be born and living out here. And we also know that disproportionately levels of disadvantage are higher out here and that

the North is also home to a sizeable Aboriginal community. So I just thought I'd give you the opportunity in case there was anything you wanted to say very specifically about services or access here in Adelaide's North.

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

It needs to be transformational in terms of what needs to be considered for Northern Adelaide. We have a very dense Aboriginal population. We've got a very young Aboriginal population. We've got very high, as you said, very high levels of disadvantage, high child protection rates, and the role in which our early learning centres can play in this space is really important. One is to ensure that we have greater partnership and engagement with the Aboriginal community here in developing anything that we might want to point a stick at and say, that's transformational, or we need to do something innovative. The fact that we have Aboriginal services out here is a great starting point, but the Aboriginal community is the starting point for which we need to focus our efforts on in getting an understanding of what that solution looks like for our Aboriginal children and families. As, I said something before about understanding what early help and what early intervention looks like, and we don't have in the North here, what would we, what we could typically say is an Aboriginal community centre. And wherever I've been, and my own lived experience and my own professional roles that I've had over the years is the, the importance of, you know, an Aboriginal community centre or an Aboriginal council in one's own community. It's a beacon in our community. It consolidates the way in which engagement happens, in the way in which decision making and Aboriginal community happens. It consolidates leadership in an Aboriginal community. So all the things that you need in terms of pillars in your community to help garner all those things for reform are not necessarily here in the North for our Aboriginal children and families. And that's when I refer to a centrepiece, like an Aboriginal community centre, an Aboriginal council. And so, we've got Aboriginal service units in government services here. We've got, we've got to think about what that looks like in terms of Aboriginal community control in ensuring that when we start talking about planning and doing things differently, what becomes glaring obvious is that huge gap in the North here, that there is a lack of a centre that brings the Aboriginal community together, and acknowledging how that plays a really important role when we think about how we relate that to Aboriginal self-determination and how we leverage the voice of our families and the voice of our community in designing and developing things. While we certainly are in a really good position in South Australia to take full advantage of the voice and what that might yield at the local level, the one entity that reflects the way in which you work with the Aboriginal community, for the backing of our children and our families is an Aboriginal community centre that brings that all together. And my first two reports actually speak about how that's really important in redressing inequity, in redressing injustices at a local level for Aboriginal families, our children and their communities. So in the North here, I talked about how understanding what early intervention and early help looks like. You know, when a family is experiencing distress, you don't need to wait for the tertiary response. There's nothing that prevents, there's nothing preventing a whole service system getting together with the lead of Aboriginal people, that are in those service systems, engaging those families and working out a way in which to bring about the support that's required for the family, for the benefit of that child or children. And I'll take you to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which at this minute is applied in regards to Aboriginal child removals Aboriginal child placements. But I

can tell you now that principle in its fulsome is inclusive of ways in which to do preventative work, how you should be working in partnership with the Aboriginal community, how the service system needs to acknowledge and actually work with families. And that families are experts in their own experiences and families need to be leading decision making. But far too often the system, whether it be, you know, early child education and health services, child protection, will work around the family and be there at the well what we call the tertiary and when it's too late, and we have the most adversarial response, which is the intervention of removal. But therapeutic services need to be afforded to our children and families. And the way in which that happens needs to be from get go, from antenatal services to the, you know, early childhood services. And at this minute in South Australia, if we understand what is taking place in this jurisdiction over the last three decades, the amount of resources that are going into early intervention are dwindling phenomenally. And that slice of the pie, what it looks like today and what it looks like in terms of reaching our distressed families, is highly inequitable. And so whilst we're doing all this work to increase our Aboriginal children's access to early childhood education services and everything that comes with all the important things in a child's first thousand days, we've got exemplars, you know, but resourcing and to expand them. And, you know, the, scale them up needs to be adopted for these particular services, whether it be the Aboriginal maternal infant care program and how that relates to the first thousand days, services to Aboriginal children and families is really important. So, and what's wrong within a service system in early childhood education and early learning in being able to work with our families like Taikurrendi do in Christies beach. So there's lots I could talk about, but I know I'm feel like I'm going in a bit of a rut here, and I'm just going to quickly just go, just, so I can be a bit sharper and go to my, my submission. Can I just have a minute to do that, excuse me.

COMMISSIONER

No problems, do that, take your time.

COMMISSIONER LAWRIE

In order to receive a service, our families need to have confidence in the services and need to have confidence that it'll see them as wanting to support their child, rather than seeing everything in a negative, deficit focus. To see the child and their family with strength is really important. And understanding that the reluctance is often, the reluctance to engage is often about the struggles with racism in service systems that often neglect to actually acknowledge the child and their family and the cultural context in which they live their lives. But also how the experience of racism is confronting for their child and their family in the way in which they experience far too often injustice in service delivery. So there is a wariness about engagement, so when I said that there should be a growth in Aboriginal children's centres, the research and the evidence is out there about their positive impact, their high impact for our Aboriginal children and families. In terms of what is before our families, when we want early engagement in service systems, is that the early engagement beckons responses from service systems that see disadvantage rather than children and families experiencing high levels of impoverishment, which the cycle that is experienced with poverty, then equates to our children

and families being penalised, being up against service systems that see them as not wanting to engage, but rather not being understood by service systems.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I have no further questions Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER

That's very helpful. Thank you. So thank you for your submission and thank you for your evidence today and our time has grown short. So thank you so much for coming and for everything else you've done to support the work of the Royal Commission. We are very grateful for that. So thank you.

COMMISSIONER LAWRE

Thank you so much.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

The witness can be released. I call Tina Quitadamo.

< TINA QUITADMO AFFIRMED

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You are currently the Advisor of Aboriginal Early Years within the Office for the Early Years division within the Department of Education, is that correct?

TINA QUITADAMMO

Yes. Three months in.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You've also had a lot of experience working within various sectors, but importantly, today too, you've worked within and run Aboriginal community controlled organisations and Commissioner Lawrie just touched on those in her evidence in the session before you. Would you like to give Commissioner Gillard some more information about your background and how you came to be in the role you are in now, and then we'd really like to try and learn from you about the successes that you've seen within Aboriginal community controlled organisations and how we can leverage that within early childhood education and care.

TINA QUITADAMO

Yeah. Thank you counsel. Well, I just want to acknowledge first, and shout out to my ancestry. I'm a very proud Kirrae Whurrung/Gunditjmara woman from the Eastern Maar Nations of the Western districts of Victoria. It's really important I do that because I still consider myself a visitor to this beautiful Kurna country and sovereignty of these lands have never been seeded, always was always will be Aboriginal land. And I recognise my privilege of being here on Kurna country. I do want to make a quick shout out if I may, to all the first nation leaders who have contributed so truthfully to this Royal Commission and, acknowledge the expert leaders, but also those of our Aboriginal personnel and leaders that aren't actually here today that work every day with children and families. I just acknowledge that. And may I be as bold to say before I go ahead, and I'm probably not as versed as doing these kind of things... and so I will read off my notes if that's okay from time to time. You know, I'm always in aspiration of Commissioner Lawrie and her amazing knowledge and depth of wisdom and her, you know, she's such an orator. I want to actually open before we even go beyond, to say that I have an aspiration and my aspiration is that I want to see the day when I'm no longer reading, reviewing, and hearing the words of vulnerable and disadvantage written in sentence form, or being spoken of conversely about our Aboriginal children and families and communities. I really want to see that day. And I remember as a 20 something, and I will get to your questions, I recall going to a SNAICC conference in Townsville so many years ago and had the opportunity to listen to one of our Aboriginal early years leaders, Dr Karen Martin. She was so generously sharing her teachings and her experiences, and she talked about the strengths of our children and the beauty of our culture. And, but of course of things that actually can compromise their potential and our community's potential. And I remember sitting there as that 20 something, you know, like a little, soaking things up like a sponge and the use of that language deeply resonated with me and it, and it's to this day that I try and always use, if I must make any distinctions, at all, is use that language, 'compromise potential'. And when we stop and think about that for a minute, I think it actually comes from a very strength based place. And it says that potential lies in all of our children. And though we know that there are very real things that can and do, you know, compromise their potential and I am under no illusions about the very real gaps and the unprecedented levels of overrepresentation of our children and our young people across a range of social determinants. And that system burrs and failures are still prevalent. And I think the Royal Commission does afford us such an important opportunity to redress this. So I just really wanted to say that that's an aspiration I hold dearly to my heart and a lot of people know me know I'll wear my heart on my sleeve. I will lead into your question about my experiences, but I want to just even preference that if I may. And some of what I say actually harks back to the very strong and passionate words of Commissioner Lawrie. There's a great synergy of thought. Accessing high quality ECEC in the first thousand days has consistently been shown to improve children's developmental outcomes with a particularly strong effect for children whose potential is compromised. It will have a strong effect on our children if it's done the right way. And in the words of Noel Pearson who I actually had an opportunity to listen to last week in the Adelaide Town Hall, he was talking about the Uluru Statement of the Heart and the deeper understanding of that, he said, 'we have to get the programs right. The policies right. And indeed the system's right'. The Royal Commission has already identified that the first thousand days should not work in isolation with the other inquiry lines. And I concur with that. And I know that they're all part of

the algorithm of an aspirational holistic ECEC system and enhanced by the nexus of health and wellbeing, and social and emotional support, child protection, parenting advice, and support. And I recognise all these as important elements and Commissioner Lawrie spoke to much of those nexuses and those touch points with education, you know, around maternal infant healthcare and things like that. But additionally for Aboriginal children to design a system right, it must be enshrined in what I call, and bare with me, capital Cs: country, culture, connection, community, choice, control, self-determination, community control, collaboration and champions. And, you know, we need champions. You could probably add lots of other words starting with C to that, you know, to positively optimise, you know, outcomes. And I'll leave that for you to do as a bit of homework. When I further think about the capital Cs, it also speaks to our children's rights. And I quote Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett, Auntie Muriel, who says culture is not an optional extra for our children. Connection to culture is their right. And bringing our young children up in their culture is the key to making sure they feel safe, feel loved, proud in their identity and are able to fulfil their potential. Commissioner Lawrie and SNAICC have done a lot of work in trying to elevate and amplify, and shine a spotlight on our children's inherent rights. And I concur with their work and you know what they espouse there. When I think about access and participation for Aboriginal children in preschool in any early years year system, I particularly refer to article 13,¹ which is around our ways of being and knowing where Aboriginal people have the right to revitalise, use, develop and pass on to future generations our ways of being and knowing. This includes history, oral traditions, languages, and ways of communicating, and many more other things. And article 14 around our rights to education and article 13 decision making. We have the right to participate in decisions that affect us.

My background, as you were saying, what brings me here today? Well, there's many who have influenced me, mentored me and challenged me, 'growled' me, and inspired me. And as you said, I've worked in both state and Commonwealth for some 30 years in my professional career, and I've done a full circle after having the privilege to lead two Aboriginal community controlled organisations back into state government. I have to say that it was somewhat bittersweet for me to re-enter the state government and still see that improving, increasing the enrolments and attendance of Aboriginal three and four year old children and children in care remains a prominent feature on yet another strategy. These were the same kind of conversations from when I was the director of Kura Yerlo Children's Centre in 2000, some 20 odd years ago. There are Aboriginal leaders in the education system, trailblazers, some that have gone, who dedicated their whole life to early years in education and some that are still with us. So that 20 years that I've seen it there, they will tell you, but it's been there a lot longer than that. So it was bittersweet, still seeing that. I want to be able now, yeah, briefly share some of those experiences, with the ACCOs that I had the privilege to lead. And one of them is the Nunga Mi:Minar Northern Regional and Domestic family Violence Service. Its an Aboriginal women's led, governed, managed, and frontline delivered service for Aboriginal women and children. And I thank you for the opportunity to enable me to amplify the voices of the often voiceless cohort. And that is our Aboriginal women and children who are living with and or fleeing domestic and family violence. Nunga Mi:Minar is one of many dedicated domestic and family violence services across this state who serve Aboriginal women and their families. In my time at Nunga Mi:Minar, we would see approximately 200 women, well, 200 Aboriginal clients

¹ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

a year from all over South Australia and interstate who had short and extended periods of stay with us. And some came back through the service multiple times. We all are aware of the recidivism, such as the scourge of domestic family violence. Approximately 60% of the children, clients were children. And they were clients in their own right from birth to nine years of age. Aboriginal practitioners provided individualised case management. My experience saw mothers, despite their own complex trauma and challenges, still held hopes and aspirations for their children to get a good education and provide as much of a normal and safe routine for their children as soon as possible. This included accessing playgroup, childcare, preschool school, and OSHC services. It took a lot of courage to turn up at an early years service for those women when relocation had occurred. There were no familiar faces and very often the women did not have transport. And this speaks to, you know, again, what Commissioner Lawrie's already pointed out. Also what we've seen through other submissions around transport being a real lifeline for family, Aboriginal families. I note the role of the universal ECEC system has been stated as a de-stigmatized front door to more intensive services as an important part of this picture. This is especially true for this cohort. Every door should be the right door and every community should be the right community. In complex circumstances such as these, we need to ensure that we have rolling enrolments with user friendly enrolment processes. Women from these circumstances have often been left, have often fled and left behind identification and birth certificates and important documentations, blue books, the works, they just up and leave. They need, we need to ensure that, you know, the environments are welcoming and culturally safe interactions are there, and that they build trusting relationships to help her rebuild her social networks after being in many cases, socially isolated; culturally responsive and trauma informed and aware educators; and indeed culturally responsive wraparound services. So we need to ensure that the first interaction responses for our Aboriginal women in this particular scenario, their first interactions are that, well, we can't accommodate you because we're at capacity as a preschool. We can't accommodate you because it's not your local preschool. So these are the sorts of things we need to take into consideration as we consider opportunities that lie ahead. We must ensure that these family's relocation through no fault of their own does not mean social or cultural dislocation, or that educators are inadequately equipped to support the complex trauma the children and their families are living with. Being untrained in these circumstances can result in unintended punitive site and system responses, which works against keeping families together and adds to the distrust of service providers. A failure to do these things, as I've suggested, will reap unintended consequences and can do harm, further harm, and result in disengagement from preschool and services. And I can tell you from experiences, women and children like that can really genuinely go underground. We have to keep line of sight for these children for their own safety and wellbeing. That's significant. We have to ensure that they don't continue to fall through the gaps. This is where we must get it right. So that's a little bit about my experiences at Nunga Mi:Minar. I want to, if I may, talk a bit about Kura Yerlo, shout out to Kura Yerlo, I promised I would do that. Kura Yerlo is a not-for-profit Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation that has always had place based culturally responsive programs from the cradle to the grave, so to speak. And what I mean by that it's a whole of life view, life, death, life, and the total wellbeing of their community. That's what I mean. I had the opportunity to be both a Director of Kura Yerlo Children's Centre and later as the CEO. The children's centre there is a Commonwealth funded service under the current Community Childcare Fund Restricted funding model, the CCFR funding model. And while Kura Yerlo, I saw a number of reforms.

One that caused much anxiety to our community at the time was going through from a budget based funding model to the childcare subsidy, triple CFR model, in effect mainstreaming. I recall with the introduction and the roll out of the National Quality Framework too, our BBF services across South Australia, we felt that we were left out as we sat under a very unflattering name of 'residual services'. This was incredibly offensive on so many levels, which is a conversation for another day. But it did make us feel that this system was designed without us, further oppressed us and relegated us to a title of residual, like being leftovers. Through this Commission when considering any potential Royal Commission reform opportunities we must learn from these lessons as our communities have very long memories. As we examine an array of potential service design modalities, we must include our Aboriginal triple CFR services at the table. Sometimes overlooked, sometimes the poor man's cousin, because they're always struggling with resourcing. And yet they are a lifeline to many of our communities and indeed our children. And I just pick up on the point of transport. Our service had a 22 seater bus, it was funded. They are expensive to purchase outright and there is all the array of things around bus maintenance and safety and all that sort of thing. However, that being said, it is a lifeline to the centre and it actually can be used to enrich curriculum and pedagogical practise and programs, excursions and all that kind of thing. So, but not limited to that, you would be surprised as to the amount of creative things we did with the Kuro Yerlo Children's Centre bus, and often had to have conversations with our bus driver, 'you are not just the bus driver. You have such a critical role in getting our families to us and home again safely'.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Before you leave the, I know you've got a lot you'd like to share with us, but I think, we are particularly interested in Kura Yerlo as a model that we can look to in terms of a strength based approach. We've heard from Commissioner Lawrie earlier about models that she's seen, where elders and other community members are embedded within for the program that's delivered, is there anything you'd like to share with us about why you think these models are so successful and what are the key strengths that they bring in terms of offering early childhood education and care?

TINA QUITADAMO

Yeah, well, absolutely. I mean, the model at Kura Yerlo Children's Centre, which was part of the entirety of the Kura Yerlo incorporated, and I already touched on the fact it was almost that kind of, you know, cradle to the grave approach and I think that's a strength in itself. I mean, there's, you know, and I acknowledge actually community centres, both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal across the, they're so integral to, to all communities. I think the community centre had an array of, and a suite of programs, and access to visiting outreach services would come. We would, used to have a visiting doctor used to come. There would be the ear health checks occurring, maternal infant health, counselling, interactions with the elders programs where they would come down and they would be, you know, in the children's centre, just engaging with children in a natural way. There was the Zebra Finch Aboriginal men's group program, which, the Zebra Finch Aboriginal men's group program were synonymous with making cultural artefacts and things like that. So you can only imagine the richness of those intergenerational

relationships happening. You can't bottle that, it's priceless, it's impactful and it was a real privilege to be a part of that. I still connect to them in lots of different ways, but yeah, so I think, yeah, it's just, it's just that holistic wraparound support. I will say that, I do recall an investment into our children's centre by the state government as well. There was an initiative called the Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy, which saw us receive a resource allocation for a qualified early years teacher. And this was a good example here where we blurred the territorial boundaries, in the interest of supporting and optimising outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. You know, so that there was kind of an evidence of a hybrid combination, long day care and preschool programs, being invested in an ACCO and I'm incredibly pleased further to that to see an expansion of the Connected Beginnings programs and expansions of the triple CFR service on the table as well.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Do you know if that strategy is still ongoing? The one that you've just referred to that enabled the resource for a qualified early years teacher?

TINA QUITADAMO

I'm not sure if it's current, I will take that on note and I can certainly, you know, share that back in, post the witness hearing today. I think that it is, but I'm just not a hundred percent.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You also I think have got some very helpful suggestions to make about growing the workforce. I'm conscious of the time we have, and I know how much you've got to share, but I don't want you to miss out on being able to share some insights into what you think government can do to support a culturally diverse workplace within early years education.

TINA QUITADAMO

Yep. Thank you. Thank you so much for that. I'm quite happy to jump to where you need me to go. Yeah, I think when we talking about workforce, we are also talking about delivering quality services and programs. And I will just even, if I may, just go back just ever so slightly to say that when we talked about quality and I know that we do need to have our Aboriginal people around the table to define what quality means to them and that it's, you know, what it can look like in the East Coast could be different to the West Coast. So as an example, but the Commission recommends the state government work with the sector to define markers of preschool program quality in different settings. And as I said, I cannot stress the importance of Aboriginal people sitting at the table, contributing equally to that conversation. So I'll move to workforce as you have asked and I will go back to Noel Pearson, and he really did inspire me last week, but he also stated last week in his speech, 'we have to replace welfare with entry level jobs'. And this made me think about the South Australian Aboriginal early years workforce, the three year old Commission, Royal Commission report into early childhood education and care currently defines preschool as being delivered by a degree qualified early childhood education, according to the Preschool Reform Agreement. And I do note that there

is an issues paper commissioned by the Royal commission, written by the ECA that will test the edges of, you know, what can be reasonably preschool. And it will take into consideration Australia's demographics and our remote and isolated settings. And again, I say, please ensure that consultation occurs with Aboriginal people to gather their views on that. Okay. So in my experience at Kura Yerlo, and in what I know of many Aboriginal educators, we have what I call one teacher eye and one, or if you're a male educator, uncle eye, and there's nowhere else that you will find this unique marker of a qualified early childhood teacher within the current early system in South Australia. That is something that is unique to us as Aboriginal people, as Aboriginal educators, one teacher eye, one aunty or uncle eye. For our Aboriginal workforce, I do have another aspiration and I'd love to see Minister Boyer announce at least 10 fully funded scholarships for Aboriginal people to attain their early childhood degree, or, you know, all the like, or other entry early years courses and more investments needed in this space to further scope and address the calls for a dedicated Aboriginal early years workforce in South Australia, and indeed nationally. Leading from Noel Pearson's earlier statement, we have to replace welfare with entry level jobs. I believe that we must replace welfare with a serious scaffold investment into strengthening our Aboriginal early years workforce capacity and capability. And it must give attention to entry level training and qualifications into the early childhood education and care sector. Building in succession capability, investing in current Aboriginal early years leaders. We have so many wonderful, well, not enough really, but we have amazing Aboriginal early years leaders. And you know, to harness that, to enable them to, you know, mentor and pass on their knowledge and be resourced to do that because inevitably it may mean that they may need to come out of their services or take time off the floor if they're at work on the floor at the children's centres. So an investment to enable the, the mentoring to occur, or often we say that cultural knowledge transmission, to occur. Training people on country and training delivered through multiple modes, training delivered where possible by Aboriginal early years experts in partnership with early years experts and training industry experts and preference in training to be delivered by Aboriginal RTOs. When I also think about the first thousand days context with the rising levels of children presenting with diagnosed and not yet diagnosed multiple complex challenges and additional needs, this should also consider innovative Aboriginal led design early years positions that can provide cultural supports through cultural lens. There is an activity item that is slated, and this may go potentially to some of the earlier questions around workforce, slated in the South Australian Closing the Gap Implementation Education Schedule. I caveat that by, it's still in draft, for a dedicated Aboriginal Early Years Cultural Support Workers. But the question is where will the money come from to do this the right way? This requires substantial scoping and investment and not a reorientation exercise of existing resources. This activity conceptually though, I know it supported by Commissioner Lawrie, where she highlighted having ACCOs in primary schools and ASETOs in secondary schools and both being critical roles and that an adaption of sorts would be beneficial for Aboriginal children and their families. This is something, I'm talking about our Aboriginal workforce, I don't think there's much more I can add to that that Commissioner Lawrie hasn't already pointed out. So I will, if I may, talk about our non-Aboriginal workforce, if we have time. The National Workforce Census, 2021 National Workforce Census research report indicated that a mere 13.4% of early childhood education work educators have undertaken professional development that focuses on Aboriginal and/or Strait Islander cultural awareness or training in reconciliation. I do note the current work through the Early Years Learning Framework refresh and the elevation and increased inclusion

of first nations perspectives. But, like the children who enter our early years services with a backpack, every educator and teacher need a cultural backpack. I highlight the work of American academic, Peggy McIntosh. She sought to challenge anti biasness and challenge white privilege through what she called invisible knapsack that people can carry. And that was to also tackle discrimination and racism, and all this further supports the many calls made by submissions provided to the Royal Commission of an urgent and stronger investment in developing educators cultural capability and capacity. And I'll leave it here, and build their cultural backpack.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

How would you like to see the cultural backpack crafted and delivered?

TINA QUITADAMO

Well, in addition to ensuring that services understand all the sorts of things that Commissioner Lawrie highlighted around, what is cultural safety? I think also teachings around what's cultural responsiveness, concepts that we, you know, people need, not familiar to everybody. Cultural awareness that's been around for years. That's been around for eons and we need to be moving from that. What it means to me, it's, it's a bit around an evidence based pedagogical tools, curriculum materials, professional learning. And if I can draw upon something, an example here, and I will just let you know that I am married to a non-aboriginal early years worker. We've had many conversations over many nights, glasses of, you know, wine and we've talked about, he's and I will say he's loyally served our education department for nearly 40 years, he'll probably be embarrassed I'm giving him a bit of a shout out here. However, being a male in the early years sector, 40 years he's been working, he worked in Aboriginal focus preschools that had preschool and long daycare, one model, standalone and school based preschools. And I'm getting to my point. He told me that for the last three years, they've been doing 'Ped-doc' training, that is pedagogical documentation. And he does recognise as I do, that this is important to have in an educator's tool belt. However, with the unprecedented levels of children attending preschool with complex and additional needs, he really wants culturally responsive trauma integrated care training. So this goes back I hope to what, when you say to me what is needed, what does it look like, delivered in line, you know, and delivered with the same fortitude and investment of the 'ped-doc' training that's been afforded across the sector, across the services. And we've talked lots around this, and I believe you cannot achieve this type of understanding through online training offerings. And with due respect to my own department, PLINK online training, around trauma informed, you know, training, it needs to be face to face. It needs to be multisensory, experiential kind of learning, you know, that's ongoing, maintained, and includes listening to those with lived experiences and includes expert advice and supporting on healing, participatory engagement. What my husband shared with me is not exclusively his individual view or exclusively attached to his service alone. I hear many educators actually express their views of struggling with children with complex and additional needs because they simply haven't had adequate training. And this tells me it needs to be considered as a dedicated, targeted system response. There are opportunities here for this training to be for our Aboriginal children in particular to have Aboriginal led in its design, this implementation and delivery. And our ACCO/s and our ACCHO's, that's our Aboriginal

Community Controlled Health Organisations, they have this knowledge, they have this expertise and the lived experiences to deliver. So I guess, you know, that would be my response to the question. Do you want me to keep going?

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We've got some time, if you would like to share what you think we can, with the Commission, how we can better strengthen, Aboriginal community controlled run childcare services or services in the first thousand days?

TINA QUITADAMO

Yep. So I think I concur with the recommendations by SNAICC in their submission to provide long term commitment to the expansion of ACCO universal services, including the ACCO led early childhood services, as you, alluded. We need to strengthen and keep building on more commissioning opportunities and transfer power back into the hands of Aboriginal communities. And that goes to speak to Commissioner Lawrie's transformative change. I note that the universal three year old preschool report recommends delivering in areas of high developmental vulnerability, that there be place based commissioning of intensive services. Our ACCOs must be equitably considered in this place based commissioning that gives rise to building their capacity through seeding and capital works funding and of course, implementation and, such as commissioning or, and ensuring that commissioning and contracting, is a significant time period to allow the, you know, the response effort to seed grow, to be able to evaluate and so forth. Minimum of three year funding cycle, minimum. In terms of, I guess, a managed market approach, I also further support investigation into the establishment of locally place based implementation teams. This will recognise locally nuanced design that can provide opportunities for all communities to engage also back the other way with their Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and or their Aboriginal community members.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Particularly given where we are hearing or having this hearing today do you have any insights as to what model would work best in Northern Adelaide given that the evidence we've heard and your background in the sector?

TINA QUITADAMO

Well I think that is one where we would have to have, you know, public and community consultations with Aboriginal peoples from the Northern suburbs themselves. I think it would be remiss of me to impose my thoughts and views. I don't live in the North. I do accept that today, I'm here for a reason, and that is to provide insight. That would be my insight, that we would need to consult with Aboriginal community members, leaders, consumers, users, et cetera, themselves. The whole premise is about, it is local. It is nuanced to that local area and the Aboriginal voices, and those who will receive service, design those services. That would probably be my main point to that and that's indeed a principle.

Would I be able to talk about Aboriginal voices in the early child?

COMMISSIONER

Yeah, sure.

TINA QUITADAMO

Okay, great. Well, Noel spoke to me again, Noel Pearson also said, when I heard him last week, he said "In 1967 we were counted and in 2017 we seek to be heard". And I say in 2023, we need to see the actions. The Royal Commission Interim Report recognises the First Nation's Voice to Parliament and the South Australian Aboriginal Education Training Consultative Council. And I agree with that. However, I could not see in the recommendations in the Interim Report, how early year systems includes or will work with South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. I've been asked to talk a little bit about ACCOs. However, I think a missed opportunity is that our peak body was not named in that Interim Report. And when you look at the collective membership and the spread of that membership, I urge the Commission to take that on board as they go forward. And also indeed other relevant peak bodies, such as, you know, down the track, the proposed South Australian Aboriginal Children and Young People as well. I think they are critical stakeholders in this Royal Commission. When I also, I'm going to just go right down to community though if I may, and when I think about Aboriginal voice and Aboriginal parents being their children's first teachers, anecdotal evidence tells us at the moment in our department that there is significant underrepresentation of Aboriginal families participating on their preschool governing councils and management committees. We see the opposite of that in effect in our own Aboriginal focused early services, but there are hundreds of children that don't go to our Aboriginal focus services. And so I think there's a real opportunity to further scrutinise that, and see how we can, you know, improve that aspect of getting more of our families to participate on governing councils and management committees. We have the opportunity to do that better. A practical way I can think of, though so much has to be around it, but I believe that all preschools in all their forms must make Aboriginal representations, include Aboriginal voice and/or identify Aboriginal decision making mechanisms and have it written into their constitutions. This can occur across all sites whether Aboriginal children attend or not. And in my humble opinion, that is best practice. I think in a day and age, if you don't have a, you know, a large Aboriginal population, it's still is not an excuse not to still make sure that there's strong Aboriginal voice coming through an early year's service. There's lots of ways that can be achieved. The Royal Commission Interim Report recommendations is also, and this is in relation to Aboriginal voices, is indicative that the government would need to take on potentially a new role as sector steward over the whole preschool system, as well as continuing to be a service provider of preschool via the department of education. And in any such case, it is my further recommendation that at this highest level, we also have embedded Aboriginal voice and representation at all points of governance, stewardship, service provider, regulator, and quality oversight. Just leading from that, in terms of data and Aboriginal research methodologies, I just would like to have the opportunity to flag that if I may. I note in March, you did hear about incorporating research methodologies into program implementation. And I would just like to take the opportunity to remind the Royal Commission that this must include Aboriginal

research methodologies and evaluation processes, and certainly ensure that it includes indigenous data sovereignty. I acknowledge the Aboriginal research led evidence base is growing and largely, but not limited to the work, great work, that's undertaken by SAHMRI and the Aboriginal researchers and allies, particularly around the work of Aboriginal women, family childrens and bubs. And I just note that ACRA is an Aboriginal Families and Communities Health Research Alliance that works within SAHMRI. They have, cross sort of, you know, agency representation, community members. And so, that's, to me, one of the good examples around that they're building a really fantastic evidence base.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Commissioner, do you have any particular questions?

COMMISSIONER

No, that's been very useful. Thank you. Thank you for all of, all of the content, all very helpful for our thinking. So I don't have any particular questions. You would note that I asked Commissioner Lawrie about local situation here in the North, but you've already answered that. So thank you for that.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I don't have any further questions. Thank you for coming today.

TINA QUITADAMO

Have we got any time left?

COUNSEL ASSISTING

A very small amount of time.

TINA QUITADAMO

All right. Well, I just want to say if I may, that I dedicate this opportunity and I thank you for this opportunity, to all our Aboriginal children who deserve access to high quality early childhood education. I know that we are saturated with countless reports and strategies informed by clear evidence base and countless recommendations and now we need the aligned actions. I mean, I've got a whole list of national frameworks and reports but I really do want to still close with my opening remark, that I want to see the day when I am no longer reading, reviewing and hearing the words 'vulnerable and disadvantaged' written in sentence, I'm trying not to get emotional, or when conversing about our children, families and communities. And I think you for the opportunity today.

COMMISSIONER

And thank you to you. Thank you very much. We will reconvene until tomorrow, once again here locally and we are looking forward to that.

< HEARING ADJOURNED UNTIL 09.45AM TUESDAY 23 MAY