

# UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

Wednesday 24 June 2009 - Estimates Committee B (Thorp) - Part 2

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

### ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Wednesday 24 June 2009

#### MEMBERS

Mr Dean  
Mr Finch  
Mr Gaffney  
Mr Wing  
Ms Rattray-Wagner (Chair)  
Ms Ritchie

#### IN ATTENDANCE

**Hon. Lin Thorp MLC**, Minister for Human Services

#### Department of Health and Human Services

**Mr David Roberts**, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services  
**Mr Simon Barnsley**, Managing Director, Business Services Network  
**Ms Alison Jacob**, Deputy Secretary, Human Services  
**Ms Penny Egan**, Chief Financial Officer  
**Mr Mark Byrne**, Director, Disability, Children, Youth and Family Services  
**Ms Aileen Ashford**, Director, Reform Unit  
**Mr Des Graham**, Director, Office for the Community Sector  
**Ms Mercia Bresnehan**, Director, Housing Tasmania  
**Ms Bernadette Jago**, Co-ordinator, Housing Capital Projects

#### Ministerial Staff

**Mr Mat Rowell**, Head of Office  
**Ms Sandie Shepperd**, Senior Adviser  
**Mr David Clements**, Senior Adviser  
**Ms Kate Patmore**, Departmental Liaison Officer

**The committee met at 2.00 p.m.**

**CHAIR** - Thank you, Minister, and welcome. Before we begin, we would like to place on the record our congratulations on this being your first Estimates appearance before this committee and obviously we wish you all of the best. As I said before we started, if we keep our answers concise and our questions the same then I think we will get through this well. Minister, we will invite you to give a brief overview of your department.

**Ms THORP** - First, could I just start by acknowledging that at the table with me I have Dave Roberts, the Secretary of the Department; Alison Jacob; and Mat Rowell from my office.

**CHAIR** - And a cast of thousands.

**Ms THORP** - And a cast of thousands. Could I take this opportunity to say how much I welcome this opportunity to talk about the work of the Human Services area. I am very proud of the work that Human Services does and I would like at this point to acknowledge the excellence and diligence of David, Alison and all of the people assembled here. It has been an absolute privilege and delight to work with them over the recent months.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, and their pay rise is not available.

*Laughter.*

**Ms THORP** - Thank you, Chair; I welcome the opportunity to make an opening statement about the Human Services portfolio. 2008-09 was a year of significant reform and innovation in Human Services, and 2009-10 promises to be equally busy and productive. I would like to detail some of what has been achieved and some of the targets for next year.

Firstly, I want to emphasise that this Government has quarantined the reform of disability services, out-of-home care and family services announced last year from budget cuts and that the reform will proceed according to the previously announced budget commitments. In addition, extra funding of \$7 million has been provided in the current budget to meet salary increases for disability workers in non- government organisations which was fundamental to ensuring reform of the disability sector was able to proceed as planned. This continued funding commitment to disability, child, youth and family services at a time of significant budget savings in other areas is an indication of how important this reform is to the Government. We are committed to the changes being made and will not back away from the long-term vision, despite the fact that this is putting additional pressure on other parts of the agency budget.

Similarly, in the Housing portfolio you will see a massive injection of just over \$130 million invested into social housing and specialist homelessness services in the coming financial year- \$31 million from State funding and an additional \$99 million from the Australian Government through a recently signed national partnership agreement and the economic stimulus package. This reflects what is perhaps the largest social housing capital works program ever attempted in Tasmania and will ultimately yield well over 2 000 new homes to increase the supply of affordable housing in this State.

It is important, however, that we spend this money wisely. It is no secret that the public and social housing system around the country, including here in Tasmania, is under pressure. That is why both the Tasmanian and Australian Governments have signed up to a major reform agenda that will see significant changes to the social housing and homelessness system over the next five

years to put it on a more sustainable and viable footing going forward. This reform agenda is focused on the entire housing system-from homelessness to homeownership. It aims to not only increase the supply of affordable housing but also to reconfigure existing stock, address social exclusion and grow the not-for-profit community housing sector with the introduction of large, commercially focused and sophisticated organisations that can provide a range of products.

The new system will be overseen by a national regulatory scheme that will include integrated waitlists, improved assessment and referral processes, performance against agreed asset and tenancy management benchmarks, and generally a more innovative and responsive approach that makes greater choice and pathways through the system. Tasmania is well placed to be a national leader in housing reform, and we are in close communication with the Australian Government to maximise the funds that are now available to progress these reforms.

The need to make major savings is also evident, imposed on us by external circumstances. The realisation of these savings will occur in well-managed and locally-driven processes founded upon the reform and service models that have been put in place. As an agency, DHHS accounts for some 37 per cent of consolidated funds from current expenses.

Since the 2006-07 Budget there has been a rise in spending on Human Services of 23 per cent. In a situation in which revenue over the forward estimates period has fallen by \$1½ billion, there is no doubt that the largest spending agency has to accept its fair share of the savings burden.

As a result of the overall budgetary situation, Human Services will be expected to make substantial savings of a three per cent efficiency dividend equating to \$9.4 million in 2009-10. Human Services operation units are well placed to make efficiencies following the intention of the 2008-09 years to establish sustainable budgets. After years of accumulating deficits, every business unit was funded at a sustainable level with past deficits erased. Human Services is also able to benefit from efficiencies and support achieved through being part of the large Department of Health and Human Services.

The central part of the Department is now well defined and represents only about three per cent of staffing of the entire agency. The Human Services secretariat is probably the leanest management structure in the Department, consisting of only a dep sec and two administrative support staff. All other staff are located in the operational units. However, managing budgets within the complex system of Human Services, with commitment to continuing the reform agenda and to maximise the funding available for capital projects, does present some challenges. Spending and change must be planned and implemented over several years. The system cannot be restructured within a single year. I have more details on how we will achieve our budget savings for you later if you would like.

I would like now to continue with some of our achievements and our goals for the forthcoming year. First I will outline what has been achieved. We have restructured Human Services to reduce silos. The separate operational areas of children and family services, disability services and youth justice services have been amalgamated into a single seamless operational structure with a single line management structure and a director in each branch to coordinate and lead all services. This means that there are fewer separate silos in the services that we provide and people get a much more coordinated service.

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The links between Housing and DCYFS have also been strengthened. For example, we have created a unified team to manage the 180 properties that are owned or leased within Human Services as supported accommodation. By selling some properties, upgrading and undertaking maintenance on others and changing the use of some properties that were unsuitable for their present occupants, we are making our accommodation portfolio work much better right across Human Services. We have drawn our organisational structure so that DCYFS and Housing align to the same geographical boundaries as Education and Police and work to build better relationships at the local level with our colleagues in other agencies.

Staff who do similar work have been brought together into combined units so that the senior executive policy and program development, data management and planning, information and communication technology and finance staff in different content areas now work more together. We have now located all of the central office functions of Human Services into one building, 99 Bathurst Street, so that staff from Housing Services, Office of the Community Sector and the reform unit and Disability, Children and Family Services and Youth Justice staff are all able to work together more easily.

Similarly, at the area level, front-line staff are working more closely together to provide the best services for our clients. This includes more shared office space and greater interaction between staff in DCYFS. We have also created single teams in Human Services to deal with issues such as quality and safety and professional learning so that duplication of effort is avoided and there is better efficiency, effectiveness and coordination.

We are further contributing to the breaking down of separate Government silos by managing three important whole-of-government projects: creating the Kids Come First database that has captured all the data resources related to children and young people to build a comprehensive picture of Tasmanian children that can be interrogated at local government and suburb level-

**CHAIR** - 'Interrogated', Minister?

**Ms THORP** - You interrogate the data. So you ask questions of it.

**CHAIR** - Sounds intense.

**Ms THORP** - It is pretty serious stuff. We are also managing the project team that is planning and developing child and family centres and providing leadership for the Government's homelessness strategy. Just so you do not worry about the quantity of what I am saying-

**CHAIR** - I am worried about the amount of pages you have got. That is what I am a bit concerned about.

**Ms THORP** - I might chop it down here. There are so many milestones and achievements. I have asked for fact sheets to be prepared in relation to each area of reform so that you can each have a record of what has been achieved in the past year and what is planned for 2009-10. Fact sheets have been prepared for child protection services, family support services, out-of-home care services, youth justice and youth at risk, working with the community sector and increasing the supply of social and affordable housing. The pages that I have yet to cover are actually the highlights of the reform and our agenda over the next 12 months which I am sure we will get to.

**CHAIR** - I am sure that we will touch on those. Minister, thank you for that.

**Ms THORP** - I did try to keep it down to 10 minutes.

**CHAIR** - Obviously coordinating a new department and your new role has taken a lot of your time and effort. We as your colleagues in the Legislative Council have understood the workload that you have had. I would like to invite Mr Gaffney to kick off in output group 3 and 3.1 Child and Family Services.

**DIVISION 4**

(Department of Health and Human Services)

**Output group 3**

**Human Services**

**3.1 Child and Family Services -**

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Minister, I would like to talk about staffing numbers so that we have a better understanding of how staff are being managed. We note the funding is reasonably similar to what it was last year. How many new staff were there last financial year within Child and Family Services? How many appointments or redundancies were there? Do you have those numbers available? If you can give us the staffing situation, that would be very helpful.

**Ms THORP** - One thing that is important to say at this point is that there are huge changes going on in Child and Family Services which are going to result in quite significant changes in the way people are employed. From 1 August we will be starting the Gateway and IFSS, the Integrated Family Support Services, in the four regions around the state. They will be the single contact point for anyone in the community who wants to access any children and family services. These will be run by the non- government sector in consortia, which will have a significant effect on staffing as opposed to all their services coming from within the department.

We now employ 536 FTEs in the following areas: 200 allied health professionals mostly across child protection services; 241 operational and administrative and clerical full-time equivalents-approximately half of these are operational staff working mostly across child protection services; five SES positions across Child and Family Services, including four area directorates; and 90 IFSSs mostly working in child health and parenting services.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Do you have information regarding staff on sick leave or on workers compensation in the different areas?

**Ms JACOB** - Are you just talking about Child and Family Services?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes. Do you have figures on the accrued annual and long service leave in that area?

**Ms THORP** - An analysis of the level of personal leave which covers sick and carers leave in the Human Services area shows that the rate of sick leave has remained steady at under four per cent for the year ending 30 June 2008 and the year to date as at 22 April this year. For the period as at 22 April 2009, personal leave taken by employees in Human Services as a percentage of paid full-time equivalent was 3.83 per cent.

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**Ms JACOB** - So that is the total for Human Services, not Child and Family Services. I do not know whether you need the specific breakdown for Child and Family Services. It would be proportionate.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I am fine with that. In getting to this new arrangement, what need for outside consultancies would have been done in-house?

[2.15 p.m.]

**Ms THORP** - This whole process has been informed by a multitude of reports-the most significant of which being the Jacob and Fanning report. That informed the move forward in this whole area, if you like. What we are hoping to do is not wait until children are in situations where there is a crisis before child protection steps in. We are hoping through early intervention that an estimated 3 500 families will be diverted in the child protection system through this system. That is the whole rationale behind it.

**Ms JACOB** - In terms of the consultancies, do you want specifics on all of them?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - That would be helpful, if you have got them there.

**Ms JACOB** - We could table that. In terms of the major reform that has been achieved in Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services, the major issue in the last financial year was the review of Disability Services, and the contract for that was \$174 736 for the total review and then a further \$91 000 for the development of the disability operational framework. The operational framework is really setting the vision, the direction, for where we are going with Disability Services. That has been the major consultancy to date.

As for the work that is going on at the moment as part of the reform, we are doing further consultancies around particular aspects of work, and we could certainly detail some of those as we come to them. For example, we are doing some work around a unit cost model that would allow us to basically establish the cost for a service so that we have got equity across the State and across services. So that is a contract that we have let. Within that contract, there is also work we are doing on an assessment tool so that when people come to the Gateway Service-and no doubt we will have an opportunity to explain that later-they are able to be assessed according to a common assessment framework. The combined consultancy for both of those pieces of work is \$462 000. That is the total, and that will be carried out over two financial years. That is the major consultancy around the reform that we are doing.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Thank you. Madam Chair, there are some others that might like to ask some questions on this.

**Mr DEAN** - I want to have a look at the child protection side. Minister, what is happening on that side? Are we having increases or decreases in child protection assessments and involvement by your department in that area? Where are we with that?

**Ms JACOB** - Mark is probably in the best position to talk to this, but what we would like to do is table some statistics that show the trends of some of our key work in child protection. If I distribute those, we can speak to those statistics.

Probably the most dramatic statistic that has shown a huge change is the number of unallocated cases-in other words, children for whom we have received a notification that there

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could be a risk around that child's protection. Before we started our reform, we actually had 1 800 unallocated cases-that is, we had received a notification that the child was at risk but we had not been able to do an investigation and work out whether or not there was in fact a need to take action or do whatever else. So you can see from that statistic that at the peak of when we started our reform of child protection there were 1 800 cases, and the latest statistic we have, as of June this year, is that we had 25 children unallocated. That is a 97 per cent reduction in unallocated work, so that gives you some idea of how much change there has been.

**Mr DEAN** - Just so I am understanding that, in September 2006 and December 2006 we had a peak of about 1 800 reports in the one year?

**Ms THORP** - Unallocated.

**Ms JACOB** - That is basically where someone had contacted the child protection system and said they felt that a child could be at risk and we had been unable to get to that work because of the fact that the system just was not coping with the notifications coming forward.

**Mr DEAN** - And we have now gone to June, as you said-

**Ms JACOB** - Basically, now it is the daily and weekly work that you would expect in any system, where you have cases coming in and work being done, but now if we do have work that needs to be done at least we know what we are facing. It might be appropriate for Mr Byrne to comment on this.

**Mr BYRNE** - I could give you some answers. In 2003-04, for example, there were 7 472 notifications to child protection. That rose to a record high in 2006-07 of 14 900.

**Ms JACOB** - That is the next one over the page.

**Mr BYRNE** - So as we put the reforms in and we trialled some of the early support programs, which were the forerunners to the intensive family services, we actually witnessed a decrease in the notifications. For 2007-08 it was 12 860 and as of 31 March 2009 it is 7 780. So we are seeing a reduction in the notifications coming towards child protection, which is indicative to me that the reforms in our family services space are picking up families earlier before they become child protection cases. In issues of the direct investigations-that is where someone like a child protection officer actually knocks on the door and does an investigation-we are also seeing a trend down of around from a high of 4 630 in 2006-07 to the last full year of 3 260. So there is a reduction in the actual cases. The seriousness, I guess, of the cases coming to child protection are such that we are seeing a decrease in that, but we are still seeing significant numbers of kids requiring the protection of child protection services.

**Mr DEAN** - But per head of population, are you able to give an indication of how we fare, with the reports coming through the system, compared with Victoria and New South Wales? How does it stack up?

**Mr BYRNE** - They are actually reported in the Report on Government Services. So we can get those for you.

**Ms THORP** - What we are noticing so far with the form of Child and Family Services is that there is increased use of family support. So people are coming into the system earlier at a less

serious level. There is a reduction in the notifications and a massive reduction in the unallocated lists. To give you an example, at that peak that we were referring to on the first page back in December 2006, that was when Mark introduced a dedicated program to get through all of those unallocated cases. What you might have is something as simple-and this is hypothetical-as an absolutely fanatical antismoker ringing up because they have seen the neighbours smoking in a house with the children. Someone at child protection would have to make a decision that that is not a particularly significant or serious case, but it still remains as an unallocated case.

With the Gateway now, that very same person who is upset about smoking may ring up through the Gateway and have that complaint looked at by the assessment team and then decide that there is no issue there. So it would not go on that list which ended up creating that big problem that we had back in 2006.

**Mr DEAN** - That brings me to the recent changes that went through the House in relation to-

**Ms THORP** - That legislation supports this reform, yes.

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, and now there is the onus or requirement on people to report any situation where they believe the child is at risk whether the child is born or not. What do we expect in this area? Obviously, I guess, there will be an increase in the reported number of cases.

**Ms THORP** - It will be interesting to see what happens. I suppose, as the community becomes more used to the fact that this is the pathway you take, you may have the numbers quite high there for a while or it might take a while for the Gateway concept to accelerate, if you like, or become attractive. So I am not anticipating any major change at all, no. The change should happen at being able to divert or deflect families from getting to a crisis situation where it needs to have a child protection order put in place.

We really hope to be able to at a very early age-whether that be through visits to the child by a health nurse or some extra support provided by a social worker at the school-have a whole variety of community resources that can be directed towards a family that is experiencing a problem and, hopefully, fix it before it accelerates and to keep the family together and make sure the situation is not that serious that the child needs to be removed. That is the hope in the plan. Of course, there will always be cases where the situation is so poor and our ultimate responsibility is for the safety and welfare of the child and the state will be obliged to act, but wherever possible the idea is to deflect-

**Mr DEAN** - The member for Mersey asked questions on the staff. I am not going to go down that track, but do you have enough staff in this area to cover for any increases that may occur? That is hypothetical, I suppose. How are you currently situated with staffing numbers and the redundancy program that you are currently looking at and all of these other savings that have to be made? I am asking a general question because it will go right across your whole area.

**Ms THORP** - The important thing to recognise is that the Gateway Service is in the eye of the assessors, the Integrated Family Support Services. These are new programs supported by new money through the reform process. All organisations were required to put in an RFP-a request for proposal, which is different from the tender process-about how they would go about providing this particular service. Back Care and Mission Australia were successful. We have the Gateway Service support. I was in St Helens on Friday in the honourable member for Apsley's patch-

**CHAIR** - Did you offer my apologies?



**Ms THORP** - I did. It was at the end of the induction week for the Gateway Service. Similarly, in three or four weeks I will be up there again for the induction of the IFSS staff. These people are all new staff. They are all new because these are new reforms.

**Mr DEAN** - Are you saying that the Premier's position of being a freeze-

**Ms THORP** - But they are not employed by Human Services; they are employed by the Gateway organisation and Integrated Family Support Services, which is non-government.

**Mr DEAN** - And funded by government?

**Ms THORP** - Yes, through the reform dollars.

**CHAIR** - That is the \$50.8 million?

**Ms THORP** - Yes. Well, the reform dollars are \$20 million a year over the next four years with the 20 expended. It is about \$100 million, but that also covers reforms in the Minister for Health's area as well. The combined agenda for reform of Health and Human Services averages out at \$20 million a year, which you will notice from the budget papers. We put together a fact sheet which you might find useful.

**CHAIR** - Minister, I might say that you are the most organised minister we have had before this committee so far this week.

**Mr WING** - That is quite insulting for all the others.

**CHAIR** - As Chair I am able to call it as I see it. On top of that we have lollies on the table, Minister.

**Ms THORP** - Thank you very much. It is a credit to the people around me. Could I say at this point, Madam Chair, that, of the 208 recommendations from the child protection and child death review released in November 2006, 171-that is 82 per cent of them-have been completed, 33 are in progress and six have been reconsidered. So you can see a lot of work has been going on in this area. It is really very exciting. I think it is going to have long-term implications not just for the number of children who end up in child protection but also from an educational level. If families can be kept together and have their problems sorted at a low level, if you like, the chances of the child remaining at school and gaining full benefit from going to school are enhanced. That has implications for health, employment and leaving school. It really is quite revolutionary, but I think in another way it is just basic common sense.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Minister, I am pleased that you mentioned education and schools, because obviously that is a very important part of identifying students at risk from all ages. What is the current situation in relation to the workers that you have in the school system, and you have child and family services. Could you help us out with some information?

**Ms THORP** - Sure. With respect to the legislation that was just passed through both Houses about changes to children, young persons and their family, one of the significant changes was the capacity for members of the community-whether they be non-mandatory reporters or mandatory reporters like teachers, as you mentioned-to go through the child protection system. The

legislative changes mean, if I understand it correctly, that a teacher in a school who is concerned about the welfare of a child will have a one-stop-shop phone number to call. There is one number for the whole State, but if you ring in the south-west you will go to the south-west service or if you ring in the north-west you will go to the north-west service. But it will be one number. You will be able to register your concerns and Integrated Family Support Services will then act, whether they come back for more information or whatever. We are developing a common assessment tool so that everybody involved in the service knows what they need to do to ascertain what level of action needs to be taken.

There will also be a child protection worker embedded in each of those services, so if anyone has the least bit concern about whether or not this is a child protection issue, or it is simply one of needing to give the family some support, professionals will be on site and available to give that level of certainty, I guess, to the person receiving the complaint that they have taken the correct action. That is right, Mark, is it not?

**Mr BYRNE** - Absolutely.

[2.30 p.m.]

**Ms JACOB** - With respect to our relationship with education, because we now line up our geographic areas it is much easier for the Director of Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services to be able to talk to their counterpart in Education and Police because they all meet regularly, which has helped.

The other thing which I think is really significant is that over the last couple of years we have employed a senior officer who has been 50 per cent funded by Education and 50 per cent funded by Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services to work with the children who are our joint responsibility. I think that has really helped to get much closer relationships. For example, we are looking at care plans for each of the children who are in schools. We have now identified what schools all of the children in care go to. We are liaising with the principals. We have good data now for educational outcomes for all of the children in care, and we are able to track how well they are going and where they need further help. I think all of that has helped get a much closer relationship.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Minister, recognising the importance of communities being able to provide information and support, what community organisations does your area draw on a lot or have relationships with? I know it is numerous, but perhaps you could highlight the top three that you might use on a regular basis.

**Ms THORP** - It is interesting that the people who got the work for the Gateways and the IFSSs were all consortia. In Human Services there are 240 organisations funding 600 services and about \$16 million for the year. That is all done through the Office for the Community Sector, which handles all the grants. We are really pleased that we are able to provide indexation to the community sector through the grants this year. We did have a pretty heavy discussion about whether or not to pass on full indexation or whether or not it was appropriate for the non-Government sector to tighten its belt. In this instance, for this year at least, the indexation has been passed on. As I said, 240 organisations are providing 600 different services at a cost of nearly \$200 million.

**CHAIR** - So you had better not rate your top three. You could have 237 not very happy.

**Ms THORP** - We are a pretty tribal lot here in Tasmania, and if I said any particular three were the top three I would get myself into all sorts of trouble.

**Ms JACOB** - I think it is important to emphasise that we would be letting contracts for different services all the time to an awful lot of different organisations, whether we are talking housing or whether we are talking child out-of-home care, and I guess we would want to emphasise those processes are always open, transparent and competitive. We would be welcoming that competitive edge to ensure we get the best value for money when we are letting those contracts.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - One area of concern perhaps within schools is sometimes the lack of access to child psychology services or help because the numbers seem to be very high. How is that being managed?

**Ms JACOB** - Specifically as far as child psychology services?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Yes, and assessment.

**Ms JACOB** - Basically within Health and Human Services we do not provide psychology services, per se. We provide services to the children who are within our care, the children in care, and we do provide a range of therapeutic services including a new therapeutic service, which is about to open its door on 1 July.

**Mr BYRNE** - The Australian Childhood Foundation is working with children who have suffered traumas.

**CHAIR** - Based in?

**Mr BYRNE** - Based in the south and the north of the State. There are three practitioners in the south and four in the north.

**Ms THORP** - There is some pretty alarming research surfacing that is more and more strongly indicating that the experiences of the child from birth to age 3 to 5-

**Mr BYRNE** - Nought to three and then three to five.

**Ms THORP** - That trauma in that age group, whether it be through witnessing domestic violence or through a variety of things that can go wrong in a family setting, can have such a significant effect on a young child that it affects their brain development. I think all of us, having been around for a while, can probably look at that and say, 'That makes sense when I think about it'. We need to get that concentrated trauma therapy for those children really targeted and really give them the help they need or nothing we do over the years to come is going to significantly affect their life chances. We can fiddle with the edges a bit, but if we do not get in early and help the children-

**Ms JACOB** - Minister, I just want to clarify something. When you asked the question I answered in relation to Disability, Children, Youth and Family Services, obviously within the Department of Health and Human Services we provide child psychology and adolescent psychology services through our mental health service, but that is not within the Minister's portfolio.

**Ms THORP** - Just about the trauma therapy, which I think is really significant, the Australian Childhood Foundation has established the program. It is due to start in early July.

**Mr BYRNE** - It will start in July.

**Ms THORP** - It will deliver specialist, high quality and effective treatment services to children who exhibit or are at risk of developing severe emotional and behavioural disturbance caused by abuse and neglect. It is a significant contract-\$400 000?

**Mr BYRNE** - \$550 000.

**Ms THORP** - \$550 000.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - This is the last question from me regarding this one. I notice in your promos that there is mention of gambling support and the effect that that has on Child and Family Services. Can you give more information about how you see it fitting in?

**Mr DEAN** - The report was on top. There you go.

**CHAIR** - I am impressed.

**Ms THORP** - The Gambling Support Program is funded under the community support levy. It responds to the social impact of gambling and includes gambling support services, gambling research, community education and two grants rounds. The health and wellbeing-I just had a press release. A new grants program to invest in the social impact of gambling was going to be advertised this weekend-this Saturday, I believe-in the papers.

**CHAIR** - Surprisingly not today.

**Ms THORP** - I can announce it today and people can look at Saturday's paper. That is about allowing community organisations that provide services to people who have been affected by gambling, whether directly or indirectly, with funds to run specific programs to help with those problems. That is our role within it.

**Ms JACOB** - So that was the particular grant rounds, but if you were looking at what else is provided in gambling - and there is a fair bit there - it is basically a combination of support services, research, community education and the grant moneys, as the minister said, and a combination of those things. So they come under Mark's management.

**Mr BYRNE** - If I may, it is an area that we are actually really keen on exploring and we have the joined up DCYFS. Problem gambling is confined to geographical communities where we are putting all the intensive family support services into it as well. We want to join it up. Some of the grant programs will be targeted towards communities that are struggling with problem gambling.

**Ms THORP** - We have not started yet, but we have had some initial conversations about getting some round tables together with some of the community groups that are dealing with people who are experiencing gambling problems and the industry itself to maximise the

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cooperation between those two areas to minimise the problems as far as we can. We have not actually organised that yet, but it is on the horizon.

**CHAIR** - Minister, in your handout that you provided to the committee it talks about this statewide advisory group that will monitor the vision. Can you tell me how many people are going to make up the advisory group and how you see that what is fed into that advisory group is then able to be put into implementation?

**Ms THORP** - If I may invite Aileen Ashford, who heads up the reform unit, to the table. She is right across this.

**CHAIR** - Welcome, Aileen.

**Ms ASHFORD** - There are 12 to 15 members on that advisory group. There is a statewide one, but there are also area based advisory groups in each of the four Disability, Children, Youth and Family Services areas which would be co-chaired by the area directors of disability and family services and a community organisation representative who would be nominated at the first meeting. That will comprise all the funded services that we fund across disability, children and family services as well as other services that intersect with our service systems such as mental health, police, home pilot services. A representative from each of those area advisory groups would be nominated by that group to sit on the statewide group, and the statewide group will have those representative officers on it. It would be chaired by the Deputy Secretary, Alison Jacob.

The other people who sit on that advisory group would be the Children's Services Commissioner, the Social Inclusion Commissioner-I can get a list of names - a representative from Mental Health, a representative from Drug and Alcohol, across that service system to oversee the vision, but also that each of those area advisory groups will come up with a plan for their area that is focused on disabilities, children and families. Those plans will then go up to that statewide advisory group, which will then get a very good understanding from that data of what are the needs, what are the demands, what are the service gaps in terms of planning into the future and also resource allocation into the future.

**CHAIR** - So all that information will arrive on the minister's desk at some point in time this year. He will-but we hope it is a 'she' in the future-look at those implementation programs that have been identified and will assess whether (a) you have got the funding and (b) whether you believe they will hit the target.

**Ms THORP** - One of the interesting things that is coming out of both the Gateway and the IFSS is the action research side of it. Because these services are new, to get the maximum benefit, as people are working they are also doing their own research at the same time to make sure we are doing it the best possible way that we can so that we can adjust, if you like, our practice to be the very best. Is that fair enough to say that?

**Ms ASHFORD** - Yes, and that will also include the clients and families in those services as well as the staff. So while they are delivering the service they will be reviewing their practice and highlighting better practice.

**CHAIR** - Minister, we spoke yesterday with the Premier about the child and family centres that are going to be located around the State. There have been eight identified so far, with another 22 expected in the near future. Can you tell me how your Department has worked in identifying

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where these are going to be and also where the next four, I believe-I understand they will be announced before March of next year-will be?

**Ms THORP** - Human Services is not the lead agency with these.

**CHAIR** - But you obviously would have worked with the Department.

**Ms THORP** - We have had a heavy involvement in the selection criteria that were used for where the centres would best go, and they were looking at factors like unemployment levels, numbers of single- parent families and that wonderful report, too. Do you want to talk about that, because that it informed it, too?

**Ms JACOB** - I should just make it really clear that the group that has been overlooking the development lessons has been whole-of-Government, so it has had people from Education, from us, from Police and so on. One of the things that we were able to do was use a body of research that the Early Years Foundation has been developing which allowed us to identify where there were communities that had more children who were at risk in that early years age group and where those communities were and, therefore, where these child and family centres would best be sited.

I think it ought to be made clear that the selection of those initial eight places for Child and Family Services was based on really good objective data and that that data was collected by a project that the Early Years Foundation is going to launch next week which has brought together all of the indicators about young children and families with all of the demographic information and the socioeconomic stuff. It has put that together into a total picture of what young children and their families look like. From that we were able to very conclusively identify where there was a real need to put one of these child and family centres.

**Ms THORP** - It is going to be a wonderful tool for all sorts of different government work, because it really enables us to drill down almost a suburb where particular issues are. It will also provide some new school and baseline data when we look into the future about whether these reforms have been getting the results that we wanted. It is like being able to compare data at one point in time and then further on, because data is difficult.

**CHAIR** - Minister, are you concerned that the budget management strategies, once they are in place this year and will more than likely be in place for the coming financial year, will impact on the ability to deliver the next round of those and hence the support will not be there in the communities to go alongside the good work that is already happening in your area?

[2.45 p.m.]

**Ms THORP** - The short answer is no because, as the Premier made really clear in his state of the State address back in March, the reform dollars were quarantined. It did have the interesting impact for us though in that once you quarantine the reform money we then had to find the money for the disability workers' wage increase. This is an interesting environment to have to do that and then of course a huge proportion-I think over 80 per cent of our funding or more-goes out into direct service delivery. So we are actually looking at quite a small amount of the budget left to take those efficiencies from, but we have managed. There were some heated discussions at different times about which bits should stay and which bits should go, but we made sure that direct service delivery to the Tasmanian community was not affected. In fact, there are increases.

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If you look at the figures through it, there are increases because of the reform dollars and then also because of some of the stimulus package money.

**CHAIR** - Minister, given the constraints that will be on your department to deliver the services that you have identified-and they are incredible, absolutely-do you see the department using NGOs more into the future, that is, more than that 247?

**Ms THORP** - There needs to be a clear distinction made between the State providing a service and the State also being the person who audits the quality of that service. So best practice world-wide and Australia-wide is suggesting-and I do not think there is any doubt in any of our minds-that the actual direct service delivery should be done by NGOs and the State takes much more the role of policy direction and also making sure that the service delivery is of the quality that it should be. That is why the work that is being done by Associate Professor Des Graham-I always promote him every time I mention his name-

**CHAIR** - He probably does not mind.

**Ms THORP** - That is why the work he is doing is so important, because within his area they are also looking at the unit pricing, which means when the State is purchasing services we know, for example, that it is going to cost  $x$  number of dollars to provide a respite service or to provide an alcohol and drug referral service, just to use hypotheticals. So when the tenders go out, the different non-government organisations are not competing on the basis of the dollar, because we know what those services cost; they will be competing on the basis of the quality of the service that they can demonstrate they provide. So that is one thing that is happening. Another thing is the whole quality assurance framework which is clear things like the quality and amenity of the facilities that NGOs are using, fire escapes and insurance. All of that kind of stuff is covered off properly, and I have missed one, Mr Graham.

**Mr GRAHAM** - In terms of outcomes, it is the quality and safety, and then there is the partnership development component.

**Ms THORP** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - We will need to hear that again at the table.

**Ms THORP** - Partnership development was the bit that I missed, but we will have an opportunity to talk to the associate professor.

**Ms JACOB** - I am not sure whether you were asking what other services we might be devolving to the non-government sector over the next-

**CHAIR** - I asked if there was going to be an expansion of the 247.

**Ms THORP** - That represents the organisations-

**Ms JACOB** - Providing 640 services.

**Ms THORP** - Yes, different services. So you may find that, with the partnering arrangements that we are encouraging amongst organisations for the obviously clear efficiencies that that can provide, the number of organisations providing services may actually collapse-that is,

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two join together to provide a service. In terms of the services themselves, rather than 10 or 15- I am being hypothetical here-different family support services around the State, we might bring it down to two or three significant contracts.

**CHAIR** - So TasCOSS and Anglicare may amalgamate?

**Ms THORP** - I do not think TasCOSS will ever amalgamate with anyone, but I think TasCOSS is always going to have that role as a peak organisation representing the community sector and Anglicare will have its role. Just to clarify that a bit further in terms of service coordination, providers have been selected. The service will transfer to the NGOs by next July. Day support-

**Ms JACOB** - Not this July.

**Ms THORP** - In 2010. In terms of day support, we will put out a request for tender in January 2010. A provider will be selected during 2010 and the service will happen in October. It is the same with respite. So more and more you will be seeing the State being the quality controller, if you like, and the policy director and the non-Government sector being the direct service provider, with us keeping an eye on the quality of the service provider, the central theme being the consumer, the client in the centre. That is, are they getting what they deserve? Is it good enough? What do we need to do to make sure that service is improved? We will take on much more of that role and the actual direct service provision will go more and more out to the NGOs.

**CHAIR** - You will be the regulator.

**Ms THORP** - Yes.

**Mr WING** - The advertising program for foster parents at the moment will be covered by this line item, will it?

**Ms THORP** - Yes.

**Mr WING** - The cost of that? Could you give us an indication of the number of people who are involved as foster parents?

**Ms THORP** - This is a particular interest of Mr Byrne.

**Mr BYRNE** - I am glad you raised the campaign, because we are quite proud of that campaign. Just for your information, we are actually getting a significant number of people come forward who have not come forward in the past, which is pleasing, one week into the campaign.

**Mr WING** - It is good that it is having that impact, because it was quite prominent and good.

**Mr BYRNE** - And the rationale behind it was the ageing nature of foster parents. It is a feature of foster care programs across the world that they are having a real difficulty attracting foster parents. We have approximately 247 foster carers who are on our books-not all operational, but they would be looking after around up to 400 kids most days. Those are the kinds of figures. But we are fast approaching a place where, if we had not done this campaign and really tried to rev it up, we would be in serious strife with getting foster parents wanting to come into this space.



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**Mr WING** - How many have been attracted so far by the advertising campaign?

**Mr BYRNE** - I thought that would come up. I asked my colleagues before I came and they have fielded about 75-

**Mr WING** - Based on-

**Mr BYRNE** - They have fielded 75 inquiries to date in one week. Let me balance that. Normally they would get that many in a year, so that is important. The quantum is very high. I think the advertising campaign has prompted people to come forward who are thinking about it. They have seen the adverts and they have come forward.

**Ms THORP** - And the important point is that the advertising campaign is not costing us as much money as it could have, because it was developed in Queensland.

**Mr BYRNE** - The Queensland Government offered all States and Territories the use of their idea and concept, which we gladly took. We are the only State that has taken it, and they are very pleased that we have done it. As I said, the pleasing part for me is that the advert is very nice. It looks good but it is actually delivering. Now the test is obviously to get people accredited and on the books ready to step up. But we have processes in place that are aimed to fast-track that as well so that people are not waiting for months for their approvals.

**CHAIR** - Mr Wing, before you ask your next question, Minister, I am mindful that it is almost three o'clock and to continue on past five o'clock we need to inform Madam President. So with your indulgence, are you willing to go on past five o'clock or would you like a break and come back after dinner?

**Ms THORP** - I think we will happily go on past five.

**CHAIR** - Members of the committee? All happy with that?

**Mr DEAN** - Yes.

**Ms THORP** - Madam President is sitting behind you.

**CHAIR** - Thank you. I think that is what reminded us that it was almost three o'clock. Thank you, Mr Wing. I ask you to continue.

**Mr WING** - Are there any other questions that you would like me to ask? Are there any other points that you would like to make to the committee? I was being facetious then but, quite seriously, they are two matters that were of interest to the committee and I just happened to ask them.

**Mr BYRNE** - No, I think it is fair to say that the out-of-home care system that we are providing at the moment needs serious attention, which we are giving. It needs to be improved and we are looking to professionalise the residential carers within the system to provide better standards of care and mentoring to young people in care. But there is without doubt a real need in the Tasmanian community to come forward and stand up and put themselves forward to look after kids in care. They are still often demonised. They are often other people's problems-like they are in care, so they are other people's problems-where part of our campaign and intent is to make sure

that people own up that these are Tasmanian kids who need Tasmanian families to give them appropriate care. So anything that you as members could do to get that message out would make this director very happy.

**Mr WING** - So the families volunteering would be screened very carefully?

**Ms THORP** - Oh, yes.

**Mr WING** - Notwithstanding that, do you have any problems-or have you in recent years-with people who perform foster care?

**Mr BYRNE** - Again, foster care programs around the world often attract people for the wrong reasons in caring for children. We have a process called Step by Step, which is a guide of how you approve foster parents. It goes through an eight-week process to screen them out. That usually-it is not a 100 per cent success rate-weeds out those people who are in it for the wrong reasons.

**CHAIR** - Is the wrong reason a financial gain?

**Mr BYRNE** - It can be a whole range of things.

**CHAIR** - What would be the most prominent wrong reason?

**Mr BYRNE** - Basically because of a failure to conceive. So failure to conceive would be a reason they come forward and their actual motivation is for a child and often people drop out when they get pregnant. So they embark on this journey because they think they have problems in that area, and the Step by Step guide is aimed at trying to address people's commitment, 'Are you committed to foster care or are you committed to having a child?' They are two different things.

**Mr WING** - Does the program Caring for Children cover the risk of unborn children suffering once born because of the mother's activities during pregnancy?

**Ms THORP** - As you would be aware, Mr Wing, during the recent amendment bill that we did with children and their families-

**Mr WING** - I thought that was a very good point. I thought it would be good to have on the record.

**Ms THORP** - Yes, it is. One of the concerns that we have had is we have had no imprimatur, if you like, to become involved with the health and wellbeing of a young pregnant family until after the child is born. There is nothing mandatory; you cannot force someone to accept any assistance, but it does give us the imprimatur to be able to visit a young woman who is pregnant and potentially involved in behaviours that could adversely affect the health of the child once that child is born. Maybe we suggest if they are living in a dangerous, non-safe situation perhaps with domestic violence that alternative accommodation be found or if the diet is poor or there might be drug and alcohol taking to point out to that mother-to-be how those behaviours may negatively impact and provide that support should that person be willing to take it up.

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**Mr WING** - In the main, are the children who are in foster care there because they have been taken from the families or because the families have felt helpless and offered the children to the State?

**Mr BYRNE** - All children who are in our foster care program are subject to a child protection order or child protection intervention. So there is an element of a statutory response that has identified that those children are at risk and therefore need alternative care arrangements.

**Mr WING** - They are not put in foster care at the initiative of the parents when unable to care for them?

**Mr BYRNE** - It is quite a rare occurrence that that actually occurs. We are actually looking to open up some of the foster care programs where people who may need respite or breaks can access foster care without having to access Child Protection Services to get that.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I have a couple of practical examples to help out. In relation to the correlation between children at risk and the transient nature of some families or parts of families, how does your service actually track that movement so that when a child up and leaves for a number of different reasons-I think the one stop might help out here. Part B is a similar thing. In relation to children who come from the mainland or other places who may have issues and histories and they arrive on the doorstep, so to speak, what sort of follow up or commitment do you have or access to other agencies to get some information?

[3.00 p.m.]

**Mr BYRNE** - The second part is easier. There is a national protocol where each State and Territory agrees to inform the other State and Territory should a child or family move in where there are protection concerns. That work is part of a national child protection framework which you may or may not have heard of-and, again, I have a report if anybody is interested to see that. It is trying to take it further, not just whether there is a child protection concern but where there may be a concern of a lesser degree that they are moving around. The next stage of the information sharing will be about how we communicate that.

It is also important to say that the Federal agencies are part of this so that if a family moves from, say, South Australia to Tasmania and there is a record that there is serious concern and no-one knows where they have gone, the Centacare databank can come into play. If the child or young person turns up on that system, then there is a mandatory alert to a State agency.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Is there any Federal funding to help out with that?

**Ms THORP** - We wish.

**Mr BYRNE** - Not yet. As part of the child protection framework, there are some allocated dollars in the budgets for a range of initiatives, if we look on that side. Within Tasmania, it is obviously easier for us because we share information fairly regularly. If a family moves from Launceston to Hobart, it is fairly simple and the transfer is done in that way.

**Ms THORP** - This is probably an opportune time to let you know that-

**CHAIR** - So you do have a media release for today. Thank you, Minister.

**Ms THORP** - We are actually providing funding for a range of services for parents of children aged nought to five, including unborn children, with the introduction of a new Early Years Parenting Support Program. This is for those very crucial years that we were referring to earlier. There is a total funding of \$1.2 million per year and it is available for community sector organisations to tender for these services. I know that all members are interested in services going into their respective areas, so I can say that this is \$300 000 for each of the four districts that we have identified. The idea here is that the community organisations would provide a range of parent-child programs using interventions such as creative play activities and workshops based on attachment theory, intensive therapeutic counselling with support, as well as linking parents to other community based support services and activities. Everything is building on and layering on, if you like, that whole idea of early support given early will have all of that long-term benefit. So I am very pleased about this.

**CHAIR** - And there is no handout for that?

**Ms THORP** - Not for that one, no.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Minister, what evaluation benchmarking would you do for a program like that? If you were offering those services out, would it be at 12 months, 24 months? How do you compare apples and oranges, I suppose?

**Ms JACOB** - There are probably two things to say to that. The first is that, increasingly, any contractual arrangements we have with the non-government sector are subject to very tight monitoring and requirements, so we make it a lot more explicit exactly what we expect to be delivered, what we are prepared to pay for it and the standard to which that will be achieved. That is very much part of the work that Des Graham has been doing in the Office for the Community Sector, and no doubt we will come to that later on.

The other thing I want to say is that the action research contract that the minister has already referred to is an ongoing way over the life of the rollout of our new services that we will be monitoring how well those services are going, where we need to make changes, where there are gaps, where we need to make adjustments or whatever. I guess what we are trying to do is have an ongoing monitoring system in place for the life of the reform so that we are not waiting until it is all finished and then working out what went wrong; instead, on an ongoing basis, we can identify where things need to be changed, where amendments need to be made and where adjustments need to happen. So that is the other part of what we are doing on that.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Thank you.

**Mr DEAN** - I just have the one question on the Calmer Classrooms. It is nice to see things like that but, in reality, do they work? If you talk to teachers, they will tell you that they already have too much on their plate to take on special care and special cases within their classrooms.

**Ms THORP** - This is the very thing that teachers asked for-that is, to have their skill levels lifted so they have teaching techniques, behavioural management techniques and cognitive therapy techniques so that, when they do have classrooms that are not functioning as well as they could, they have these techniques to fall back on, if you like, because they have been trained to do it. So it is actually helping teachers and giving them the skills to actually make their classroom teaching easier. It is not the reverse of that. Aileen might be able to talk to that.

**Ms ASHFORD** - The other component of that is that there are integrated care teams being set up in Mark's area within each of the four areas. With the out-of-home care and child protection, it involves players coming around the table with the child or family and that will include those teachers in each of the schools. So the Calmer Classrooms training actually gives teachers a very thorough understanding of the trauma that many of those kids have gone through. Many of those children have been in many placements over time. This training gives teachers an understanding that the behaviour they are seeing in the classroom is not just kids being disruptive; there is actually a reason for it. So that would be part of those integrated care team meetings as well. They would get the support from Disability, Children, Youth and Family Services in working around the needs of that child.

**Mr DEAN** - So, Minister, your department obviously monitors those children in that situation in the schools.

**Ms THORP** - More and more we are realising that we have to look after the child 24 hours a day. The school needs to know-on a need-to-know basis obviously; there are privacy issues of course-that when a child is displaying a behaviour that might be offensive to a particular teacher in the classroom there may be a basis to it. There may be things happening outside of the classroom that they may need a little bit of sympathy for.

**Mr DEAN** - That brings me to the next question about privacy laws. Do the privacy laws hinder some of those things from operating properly within the service in terms of the ability to be able to pass on information that you should have on a child?

**Ms THORP** - That was one of the intended outcomes of the amendments to the act that we described earlier, and that was to put that in there to take away people's fear of sharing that information. I would not say that it has been a huge problem but it has been an impediment, if you like, to the best exchange of information. People have been protective of their patch. I think that is fair to say.

**Mr BYRNE** - It is fair to say. It is probably more of a problem with adult focused services-not sharing information around an adult's behaviour and not seeing how it could potentially affect a child. We have done a lot of work with Education to try to get people to see that. Again, I am not deferring it, but the National Child Protection Framework is taking up as a banner program how are we going to achieve better information sharing across the State.

**CHAIR** - Minister, what is the cost of that program?

**Ms THORP** - The one I just mentioned?

**CHAIR** - Calmer Classrooms.

**Ms THORP** - Was it \$800 000? I have seen that figure just recently.

**CHAIR** - It would be on your press release.

**Ms THORP** - No, it is not. In order to assist schools in dealing with children who are in child protection, youth justice or receiving other support services, \$800 000 has been committed to increase teachers' understanding and skills of childhood trauma and how this impacts on children's learning within the education system. This expenditure will occur over four years,

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commencing this financial year. The Department is currently working with the Office of Child Safety in Victoria in relation to the delivery of the program based on Victoria's Calmer Classrooms model.

**CHAIR** - I understand that it would be an asset, but how are teachers across the State going to access it? Is it going to be something that is going to be billed while school hours are operational? Then do schools need to cover a class teacher?

**Ms THORP** - I do not have that detail.

**Ms ASHFORD** - We are starting to organise that. First of all, we are rolling it out in the south of the State. There will be an initial half-day with all of the teachers involved and some of the out-of-home care staff in terms of understanding the program. Then there will be another two days of training rolled out, and then that will go into the north of the State. In terms of backfilling teachers, that has not been raised by the Department of Education with us.

**CHAIR** - It is anticipated that it will be in the holiday time for teachers.

**Ms THORP** - I do not think we have got to that level of detail yet. It is still very much at organisational stage.

**CHAIR** - So there are still some mechanics about the program to be ironed out.

**Ms THORP** - Quite often covering classrooms with relief teachers is one of the most expensive things about running a new training program. As a former teacher I know that. But whether or not we will be involved with that side of it, I do not know.

**Ms ASHFORD** - It is a joint initiative between Education and Human Services.

**Mr DEAN** - Minister, a lot of these programs are nice, fuzzy sorts of programs, but at the end of the day there is not a lot in it, unless there is some way of measuring the success or otherwise of a program like this, Calmer Classrooms. What do you have in place to gauge the success or otherwise of this sort of program? And is it reviewed from time to time?

**Ms JACOB** - We have a close relationship with the Department of Education. For all of the children who are in care, we monitor how well they are progressing in terms of their attendance rates, their literacy and all of the normal indicators. So we do have a means of tracking whether or not some of these programs are helping the children go in the right direction.

**Mr DEAN** - I would have thought it would have been quite easy in this instance, Calmer Classrooms, to track and measure-

**Ms JACOB** - That is right. But I want to make the point that a program such as Calmer Classrooms will be just one aspect of hopefully a whole myriad of things that we are doing.

**Mr DEAN** - I understand.

**Ms JACOB** - And it is often very difficult to be able to identify what the impact is of one particular program.

**Ms THORP** - I think it is important to note that all children in care have an IEP, or an individual education program, which is monitored in a case management way. So all the different adult services that are involved in the child's life would be part of the group that would be monitoring that IEP and making sure that the plans being put in place for the child are actually being executed.

**Mr DEAN** - That is the important thing-that they have been put into place and are operating.

**Ms THORP** - We have an enormous responsibility, because once we take a child into care we are the parent and we have to do the absolute best.

**Ms JACOB** - This is the parent of 600 children.

**Ms THORP** - Yes. Well, it is not actually me; it is people like David-

**Mr DEAN** - Well done, David!

**CHAIR** - Minister, with your indulgence, I think we will leave 3.1 and move to 3.2. We have covered a lot of areas.

### **3.2 Youth justice services-**

**Ms THORP** - I am mindful that there is a lot of material to cover.

**CHAIR** - We could have spent the whole time with you, Minister, on 3.1.

**Ms THORP** - I know.

**CHAIR** - As I said, I am mindful that we have more areas to cover.

**Ms THORP** - There has been a lot of work going on with the Youth Justice Act. We are not trying to imply that there are a lot of things wrong with it, but there will be things we can do by making amendments to the act which will make what we want to do with young people easier to achieve. Some significant improvements have been made at Ashley Youth Detention Centre. This includes a resident advocate being appointed to work on issues and concerns raised by residents and to make sure that residents have a choice. There has been a 25 per cent increase in the amount of time available for residents to access school-

**Mr DEAN** - There is a strong recommendation from our committee.

**Ms THORP** - That is right. The behaviour management system is being reviewed with help from the Victorian Youth Justice Services. Additional staff training and development unique to adolescent development and the effects of poverty and disadvantage have been provided to operations staff so they have a clearer empathy with the kids that they are looking after.

**CHAIR** - Minister, it is not necessary, I do not believe, to read all of that if you do not mind.

**Ms THORP** - I won't.

**CHAIR** - As I said, I am mindful that we will be running out of time. We appreciate the fact that it is on the sheet in front of us.

**Mr WING** - Minister, about two or three years ago I heard Mr Michael Hill, a senior magistrate who has a particular interest in youth justice matters, speaking at a Whitelion function. He was saying how helpful it would be for the courts to have wider and greater sentencing and order options. I imagine comments like that are being taken into account in the review of the act; would that be so?

**Ms THORP** - They certainly are.

[3.15 p.m.]

**Mr WING** - Could you give us an indication of what is likely to be proposed, or some of the things that are likely to be proposed in relation to that matter?

**Ms THORP** - What we want to look at is early intervention. May I say at this point how much I admire the work of Whitelion. I am very pleased, as I understand it, that there is going to be more work with Whitelion.

**Mr WING** - And they appreciate very much the funding that has been provided.

**Ms JACOB** - In the review of the Youth Justice Act there are a number of issues that have been canvassed. At the moment we are waiting for the community and various and particular groups that were contacted to respond, but one of the things being proposed as an option is to increase the number of sentencing options and other orders that are available to magistrates. That would include deferral sentences, orders to a rehabilitation program and the combining of sentences. Those three options have been specifically canvassed, but under the amendments to the Youth Justice Act we are looking at getting a response from magistrates, the community and all of the other interest groups so that if there is sufficient support, we can then look at including those options as part of the amendments to the act.

**Mr WING** - That is good. Has Mr Hill been consulted yet?

**Ms JACOB** - All of the magistrates have been individually consulted. We are very lucky that we have a project officer looking after this who has worked in justice and who has worked in the court system, and she has had individual interviews with all of the magistrates.

**Mr WING** - That is good. So I take it that funding for Whitelion is being continued?

**Ms JACOB** - That is one I do not know.

**Mr EVANS** - The new funding actually comes out of the appropriations of the Department of Economic Development.

**Mr WING** - I see.

**Mr EVANS** - So my understanding is, yes, the decision that was made earlier this year to increase that amount of funding was a three-year commitment.



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**Mr WING** - I appreciate your comments. I am sure that all associated with Whitelion will as well.

**Ms THORP** - I have had some connection in the past but not in the last couple of years. I was very impressed with what I saw and experienced.

**Mr WING** - Yes, they are doing good work.

**Ms THORP** - Within the whole area of youth justice it is one of those conundrums in a sense in that it does not really become the bailiwick of youth justice until that young person has got themselves involved with the courts. We want to do a lot more work prior to that, so earlier interventions and hopefully diverting young people from ending up in the youth justice system. Quite a lot of work has been done in Nick's area, working on a youth at-risk strategy, and that is collaborative with Education and Police and Corrective Services. Is it Corrective Services?

**Mr EVANS** - Not so much; just Police.

**Ms THORP** - Of the many hundreds of kids who come into contact with Youth Justice Services in any one given year it is a very small percentage that end up at Ashley. It is only about 4-5 per cent; is that right, Nick?

**Mr EVANS** - Yes. We have about 1 250 kids a year coming into contact with the youth justice system, and about 150 of those receive a custodial sentence.

**Ms THORP** - It really is quite heartbreaking if you look at the charge list of a young person who may at any one time be one of the young people up there on remand. Your instinctive reaction is, 'What on earth is someone doing up there on remand?' But if you go back often the charge is for several car thefts, break and entry, assault, damage to property, and at that time they may be on remand for a particular charge but they have often been there a lot. Most of the interventions are in the form of community service orders, case conferencing and that kind of thing.

Ashley really is a last resort but we are very aware, particularly as Mr Wing was saying, that you do not want the magistrate to be sending the kid to Ashley because they have protection and welfare issues concerning them. We should have other options if someone is in front of a magistrate than saying, 'I have to send this young person to Ashley because I am concerned about their welfare if I bail them into the community.' We have to have options there for those young people-accommodation options and also an opportunity to get the kind of support levels in and get them in quickly to try to help them.

**CHAIR** - We have heard the story, Minister, in the chamber about the young lad who decided that at Ashley you could get to watch the TV and have a warm bed where you could not get it at home.

**Mr FINCH** - Just on that subject, too, like many people I am concerned about the long wait that some of these young offenders have before their cases are resolved. They are often remanded in custody at the Ashley detention centre seemingly sometimes for longer than the actual sentence that they would have eventually received. It was interesting to note just in the performance information-I really investigated this with the Minister for Corrections and I noticed in the Magistrates Court (Youth Justice Division) they are looking for a target of 20 per cent pending

cases older than six months. So they are trying to reduce that to 20 per cent of the caseload. I am just wondering, have you any concept of the bottleneck that is occurring so people are held up?

**Ms THORP** - There are some issues for us there, because we have no control over the number of young people the police charge. We have no control over their efficiency. If they go out there and catch the young people and charge them with an offence, then we have no say in that. We also have no direct control over the amount of time it takes for any particular case to be heard. Nick, you might want to add to that.

**Mr EVANS** - It is a very rare occasion that a young person would be on remand at Ashley for six months. I would imagine there would be no more than one a year-a young person who has been in that situation and most often they are there for quite serious offences. So many of those cases that are in the backlog that you are talking about, those young people will not necessarily be remanded into custody; they will be bailed or in other sorts of arrangements. We have, though, at any one time about 60 per cent of young people who are in Ashley on remand. They are there on remand-and it is a bit hard to say, because some of them are only on remand for one or two nights; others can be, and in a rare occasion, up to six or eight months. Typically, you are looking at, I would say, three to four weeks to be the typical time a young person is on remand. So it is an unusual circumstance that it would be as long as six months. I guess we would agree that that is not acceptable and I am sure the courts would also see that.

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, because there are some processes that are quite timely when you are going through the Magistrates Courts, through that process.

**Mr EVANS** - Yes, and it is especially the case when the young person is charged as an adult, for example, because of the nature of their offence, the jury is empanelled and all of those sort of issues. It is a significant time when the offence is a serious one.

**Mr FINCH** - There is another question that I have-

**CHAIR** - You are welcome to ask it.

**Mr FINCH** - On Ashley. Okay. In respect of the work that goes on there and the costs that come back to Ashley, in respect of the contract work that takes place at Ashley, would that come into your bailiwick, Minister? I am thinking about when the prisoners or the youngsters there need to travel.

**Ms THORP** - The secure transport is a contract. There is a contract in place at the moment which I think is due to expire in about February 2010.

**Mr FINCH** - What is the extent of that? Is that a costly sort of service? I am under the impression that it costs about \$1 000 to take somebody from Ashley to Hobart. There is no sharing of vehicles or anything and it is quite a costly process.

**Ms THORP** - My information says that the cost to the department for the service, which is a tendered contracted service for secure transport, is under \$250 000 for the year.

**Mr FINCH** - And that is just for Ashley?

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**Ms THORP** - Yes, and as at March 2009, the total number of secure escort transportations was 524, comprising 272 to and from the south, 201 to and from the north, and 43 to and from the north-west.

**Mr FINCH** - But doesn't that seem like a large amount-\$250 000 in transport?

**Ms THORP** - Yes. Well, as I said, it is tendered and my understanding is that in the not too distant future the tender would be up for renewal?

**Mr EVANS** - Yes, that's right, but I guess that-it is a costly service to provide because you cannot put one-it is at least two people in a vehicle on every occasion. The service has to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, because if a young person offends at 3 o'clock on a Sunday morning-and despite one incident that was in the press a few months ago-we do not want them held in adult custodial arrangements. So that sort of capacity to transport them has to be available at 3 o'clock on a Sunday morning and, you know, appropriate numbers of staff members, depending on the young people involved, have to be available to transport those kids to Ashley and then subsequently back to court appearances.

As we have sort of alluded to, sometimes there can be three or four or five court appearances in one matter. Although we had video facilities available on site, sometimes for understandable reasons magistrates are reluctant to do that and actually want to eyeball the young person involved. So, you know, all those things added together do make it an expensive service to provide. But obviously when we let the tender, the cost of it is pretty important in the decision we make.

**Mr FINCH** - It just stood out to me, that is all, without an understanding of what the service was there for.

**CHAIR** - How long will the next tender be let for-the length of time?

**Ms THORP** - I will just throw that one back to you. I am not sure. I do not think my briefing note actually had an end date on it.

**Mr EVANS** - The current tender is two years with an option for a further year if both parties are amenable to that happening. I do not think we see any reason that we would change that length of time. So it is two with an option for another year.

**CHAIR** - Any other questions, members? Mr Dean?

**Mr DEAN** - We have looked at some of those issues and the matter that the member-Kerry-raised in relation to the waiting time is another issue that was raised in the select committee inquiry which I was a part of-the waiting time. I think there were too many cases for us to accept and we made a strong recommendation about that.

**Ms THORP** - Waiting time for the court appearance?

**Mr DEAN** - Waiting time on remand and to process and so on. So we were very, very conscious of that. The other issue raised, Minister, and I was wondering whether or not you were considering it-and we have sort of touched on it today-is that there needs to be, and it was in this recommendation as well, some place before Ashley for youth to go to. Currently if it is a welfare

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issue, as you have referred to, magistrates will send them to Ashley. They need somewhere else to probably put that child in the meantime before they get to Ashley. Is that being considered as a part of the strategy you mentioned before?

**Ms THORP** - Yes, I think that is something that will be canvassed in some detail during a review of the Youth Justice Act. I think we are also looking at it with our accommodation options program. Sometimes the magistrate actually says, 'I want this young person to be put in accommodation where they are not in contact with other people', which precludes Ashley, which becomes somewhat problematic for the department to then have to find secure accommodation for one young person.

**Mr DEAN** - That is great that is being considered. We were hoping it would be.

**CHAIR** - Home detention, Minister?

**Ms THORP** - Is that something that we have-

**Mr EVANS** - It is not something that we have seriously considered, it is probably fair to say, and it is not something that operates, generally speaking, for young people in other jurisdictions either.

**Ms THORP** - It is not something that has come up in the papers before us.

**Mr EVANS** - I guess the major reason for that is it is often a way of setting up the young person to fail because an expectation, no matter what sort of security arrangements that you may put in place-

**Mr DEAN** - That's why they are in trouble; they never stayed at home.

**Mr EVANS** - If a young person defies their home detention order, it escalates their entry into the justice system even further. I think that is why in the main it is not really seen as a viable option because all you will end up doing is that young person will breach the home detention order and therefore escalate further on into the justice system.

**Ms THORP** - I think it is fair to say that all of us are very committed to the kinds of recommendations that came out of the Ashley report, the kinds of things that the Commissioner for Children has said about what changes we would like to see happen with young people, particularly youths at risk. I do not think there is any disagreement that there needs to be options other than Ashley, but Ashley is the appropriate place for a lot of them.

[3.30 p.m.]

**Mr DEAN** - There is no doubt about that. Minister, do we currently have any youth under 18 years of age at Risdon?

**Mr EVANS** - No.

**Ms THORP** - No.

**Mr EVANS** - We do not at the present time. There are a number of kids - two in the last 12 months - who have been in Ashley and turned 18 and have been transferred to Risdon -

**Ms THORP** - To serve the rest of their sentence.

**Mr EVANS** - to serve the rest of their sentence, but there are no young people currently.

**Mr DEAN** - That is a good position. The other one was related to recidivism and youth. How are we targeting that, where we have the same youth coming back before the system time after time?

**Ms THORP** - That is what I was referring to when you said earlier; you should see the charge sheets for some of the young people who are up there. It is multiple offences over a long period. The return rate is 47.1 per cent for the 2006-07 financial year.

**Mr DEAN** - That is a huge return. That is almost half.

**Ms THORP** - And 36.3 per cent.

**Ms JACOB** - When you think this year it was a reduction of 10 per cent -

**Mr DEAN** - It has come down.

**Ms THORP** - Even so, I will agree with you; it is an issue. It is a problem. But put into context the fact that in Tasmania about two in 1 000 young people come in contact with the youth justice system. I think that was the figure. Over 95 per cent of those do not go to Ashley; they are involved in other diversionary things like case conferencing, community service orders and things like that. We are really looking at quite a small proportion. That is not to say it is not an issue, though. We are really talking about young people with very complex needs and a variety of issues that need to be confronted.

I ask myself on occasion, 'I wonder how many young people who end up in Ashley have had other issues that have gone on for all their lives and were not known about, like foetal alcohol system or an acquired brain injury of another type?'. We do not really know these things. We just know that there are troubled young people out there who get into a bit of mischief at 10 and by the time they are 15 or 16 if an intervention has not been successful they are getting themselves into some pretty serious trouble. You would be well aware of that.

**Mr DEAN** - How many of the programs are you involved with now? I am trying to think of them. One was Project Currawong. You might not remember that one -

**Ms THORP** - No, I do not.

**Mr DEAN** - They take a lot of the at-risk youth out of Ashley and take them out on a five-day jaunt. On that one they went up around the Central Highlands for five or six days. There is a program in South Australia, I think - I can get you the detail on this and I think it came out in our Ashley report, if you have read that - that they run on a frequent basis of targeting those youth in Ashley - the recidivists in particular - to bring them into those programs. They say that they have had a huge success as a result of the program.

**Ms THORP** - That is the type of thing that has been looked at within the Youth at Risk strategy. A lot of work is going to have to be done because a lot of the kids we are talking about

here are actually school-age students. They really should be in school. We are loath to be trying to develop a whole lot of services out there in the community which really form the function of a drop-in centre for kids who really should be at school. I am not denying that some of these places actually achieve results with kids, but whether or not they are the right way to go is something that we want to be very confident about. When we do decide on those kinds of services like the ones you are mentioning, they would be put out to tender and there would be a very transparent process.

**Mr DEAN** - The programs I am talking about are short term. They are only five- or seven-day programs.

**Ms THORP** - But you may pay for a service that has a rolling program over 12 months to take out different groups of students. They may have that job for a three-year contract.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - It is understood that to return a young person who has been at risk, say, from Ashley back into an environment where they do have very few role models and very few people around them who can actually support them - the programs that Mr Dean has been speaking about. There have been studies done that they are only a short-term fix and they soon go back to the behaviours that are not accepted in a community. Schools are going to have to come to terms with creating a community of networks and friends outside of that young person's close group to be able to do that. I am interested to hear what programs are around in our schools at the moment for the students who are actually already in this category, because they are the ones that we are going to need to do some work with now instead of waiting for something to happen in the next six, eight, 12 or 18 months. Are there any programs currently available?

**Ms THORP** - I will get Nick to talk about that, but you would be aware, too, that the boys and girls at Ashley are getting a much richer educational experience than they were up until recently. The school year has been extended to 48 weeks, which is wonderful, rather than the normal 32 weeks. Also, some work has been done to expand them into more polytechnic type courses. There is even some consideration being given to purpose-built buildings to be able to teach that kind of course. But the extra funding that has gone into the school there has also enabled staff at the school to be part of the transition process back to the high school, which seems to be going quite well, doesn't it?

**Mr EVANS** - Yes. One of the programs that we have introduced in the last 12 months relates to the fact that many of these kids have not been to school for quite some time prior to their stint at Ashley. Their engagement with the Ashley school and with teachers at Ashley is often the first sort of positive interaction they have had with an educational environment for a long time. So we have taken the relationship that they build with teachers in that school and now have a teacher both in the north and the south of the State who comes out of Ashley and works with that young person in either the school that they are returning to or some other community based learning environment to help them transition back into, hopefully, some sort of productive learning environment and also to help the other staff either in the school or in the community organisation understand some of the issues and the learning styles, for example, of the kids that they are working with. That happened in the south last year.

Given the nature of the kids involved, it is not always successful. Sometimes appointments are made, they are meant to be at school, they do not turn up and those sorts of things. They happen. But we have had kids actually re-engage with education through building on that relationship and building on them achieving some success, both in the south and this year in the

north of the State, and that has happened through a close relationship with the learning services in both of those regions assisting us and assisting the schools in making that happen. That has been a very successful program. Especially when a young person has been in Ashley for quite a while, they become quite institutionalised. It is a big thing to expect them to walk out the gate and to turn up to school or to work or anywhere else, for that matter, at nine o'clock the next day. It is not going to happen without a level of support.

**Ms THORP** - One thing we are very keen on doing and hope to be able to do is actually have a physical transition out as well. There is one red brick building up there - it was the manager's house, I understand - and I think there are a couple of other buildings that we might be able to utilise. We could utilise them in that, during the last six weeks or however many weeks before a young person is released, they could actually be living in the house outside the wire fence and re-engaging, cooking their own food, doing their own laundry, living in a normal domestic residential environment to minimise that change from the institution that Nick was referring to. If we can do that and then also try to tie people in with the support organisations and an educational program, I think we will be doing the best we can there really.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Thank you. In terms of the principles of positive behaviour support, let us take a young student who might be going back into a school. Has there been any thought given to bringing four or five of the students from that school to Ashley in this home situation to actually develop some relationships there so that when that young person goes back to the school they already have four or five students around them who are able to lend support, because sometimes that one-to-one teacher is great but it really needs the peers around them to actually make it productive and actually make it worthwhile?

**Ms THORP** - It is not something that I have actually thought about. I think there would be some logistical concerns about taking kids out of school and taking them up to Deloraine and putting them in a house with this young person who is transitioning out, but it is certainly worth exploring.

**Mr EVANS** - I agree. We have done a similar thing with school staff. We have had teachers and principals, for that matter, actually come to Ashley School and meet and attempt to establish relationships with a young person before they have been released, but we have not done it with students.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - There is a program that can do that. There is a program that does that work. You could talk to them.

**Ms THORP** - That would be great.

**CHAIR** - At the break, if we can get one.

**Mr FINCH** - Just harking back to what I was talking about before in respect of contract work, I think there are about 80 staff with about 10 casuals out at Ashley.

**Mr EVANS** - There are 85 FTEs, probably about 100.

**Mr FINCH** - So casuals as well. I am just wondering whether you need to draw on security personnel to assist with dealing with the young people out there. To what extent would you use, say, security people to top-up when people are on holidays, sick leave or that sort of thing?

**Mr EVANS** - We do not actually use a contracted security firm to top-up as you described it, but it sometimes happens that the staff whom we might bring in to top-up sick leave or for those sorts of reasons are the same staff, for example, as the transport contract we have just been talking about who provide that service, and they are a security firm. They are probably outside just normal casual recruitment processes. People who are part of Platinum Security who provide that transport are probably the biggest single source of that casual top-up pool, if you like. As you said, we are not talking large numbers but that does happen. They are not employed as security staff; it is not as though we are going to security firms and saying, 'Provide us a service.' They are employed as youth workers on the same basis as -

**Mr FINCH** - Are they trained and skilled though? We heard from the Minister earlier that a lot of these young people find themselves in this delicate situation and it really takes skilled and trained youth workers to deal with that situation. I do not know how many people who are in that complement of 100 would be trained as youth workers and have those skills. Is there an assurance that these security people do have those skills as youth workers to come into the Ashley regime?

**Ms THORP** - The hierarchy at Ashley-Bill and his staff-are very, very aware of which staff they would place in close proximity to which young people. At any given time, there is a capacity to move staff around so that the matching was appropriate, I would say.

**Mr EVANS** - Absolutely, that is right. Of the 100 permanent staff, about 80 per cent of them have the Certificate IV in youth work and there is a monetary incentive for them to undertake that training. They all get up to 15 days a year provided to them to update their skills and do training in the range of stuff you would expect them to. There is an induction program for anyone who comes in on a casual basis. Clearly, it is not as thorough as a Certificate IV in youth work and those people are not trained to the level that a permanent, full-time youth worker at Ashley is, but they do go through an induction process and they do have the same police check, psychological assessment and profile as all those others. But, as the minister referred to, it is then a matter of ensuring that they are not on their own in a situation dealing with those young people-that they are working alongside more experienced staff.

[3.45 p.m.]

**Ms THORP** - The Deputy Secretary just said to me as an aside that the Ashley staff are probably the most highly qualified in our whole workforce.

**Ms JACOB** - In terms of the on-site training that we provide, in terms of the induction that we do and the mandatory training that we put them through. They probably have access to a higher level of on-the-job training than most other groups.

**Ms THORP** - We are hoping to get on to Disability Services in the next two minutes.

**Mr FINCH** - I have one more question in respect of some revelations we had this morning about overtime that is paid at Risdon Prison. I was a bit gobsmacked this morning to learn that their overtime bill is up to \$3.8 million. I am wondering whether you quantify the overtime that is paid at Ashley, seeing that it is a similar circumstance.

**Ms THORP** - I can guarantee you that that would not be the case.



**Mr EVANS** - It would not be \$3.8 million.

**Mr FINCH** - Minister, if there are no details available-

**Ms THORP** - For the whole of Human Services by operational units we have the overtime. We would have to break it down for Ashley for you, but we can do that.

**Mr FINCH** - Thank you very much.

**Ms THORP** - Will that be on notice?

**CHAIR** - Yes, you will receive a request letter.

**Ms THORP** - There might be a few more tomorrow now that I notice Mr Whiteley is here.

**Mr DEAN** - We read in the paper quite a lot that people are saying-and I am not saying they are absolutely right-that we are too soft on youth and the offences they commit. The perception is that there is a lot of crime out there being committed. We read in the paper today about the cars and burnouts and so on. In your view, have we got the balance between punishment and rehabilitation and all of those things right? Or is there a lot more work to do in that regard? There has to be a punishment element to it.

**Ms THORP** - From a philosophical position, I do not think there is such thing as a bad baby. I think it is about how society treats them and the experiences they have in their formative years, which is why we are putting so much emphasis on early intervention and support for young families because that is where you need to get it right. Personally I do not think that retribution or punishment is the way to go. But realistically if someone has committed a serious offence there has to be consequences because there are issues for community safety and the community's sense of security.

At the same time, youth justice has no control over the level of police effort when it comes to clearance rates for committing crimes. From what I can gather, Tasmanian police have been doing a pretty good job lately of making sure that they are catching these young offenders, and that has implications for us. We also have very little control over the sentencing that the courts dish out to the young people. We deal with the consequences. If it is a custodial sentence then we have to deal with that. If it is community conferencing or community service orders then we have to administer those as well.

But we currently have a budget which is skewed very, very heavily towards Ashley. Of about \$14.5 million, we have about \$10 million going to Ashley and about \$3 million going to community interventions. If I could make a dream come true and have enough time to do it, I would like to see those proportions swapped, but I do not think we are going to see that happen overnight.

### **3.3 Disability services -**

**CHAIR** - I have a question that I would like to ask in relation to issuing of service agreements in this particular area. I am aware that there has been a review, and that review has recommended that service agreements should be for three years with annual reporting, yet current

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service agreements I believe are for 12 months. I should have guessed we would get a handout. Thank you, Minister.

**Ms JACOB** - Are you talking about disability service agreements specifically or service agreements, per se?

**CHAIR** - I think it comes under this area of disability services. That is the information I have been given. Obviously it was a review prior to you, Minister, taking over. So I am just interested to know.

**Ms THORP** - Sure. Des, if we are finished with youth justice-

**CHAIR** - We have finished with youth justice.

**Mr GRAHAM** - Just specifically in relation to the finance and performance framework, we introduced a new funding round for 1 July this year and the intent is to have all service agreements on a three-year time frame. Specifically, in Disability Services there was a different price rating for Disability Services-for this year only-based on two reasons. One was just the number of service agreements that needed to be done in a relatively short period, because we cannot hand down any of the funding agreements until the budget is handed down. So there are so many service agreements in that space to get done in time. The second reason was that unit pricing will come in at some point during this year, which we wanted to introduce on 1 July 2010.

**CHAIR** - Would you accept that an organisation's ability to plan, recruit, retain and commit on an ongoing basis would be much higher at a three-year contract than it would be on a 12-month contract?

**Ms THORP** - Yes, I would. One of the complicating factors for us at the moment is the business of unit pricing, which I mentioned earlier. Once we get on to unit pricing, we will see the situation rectified. But that has not happened yet. That will, I think, have an amazing impact on the quality of services that people with disabilities and other recipients of service provision in this space get because, as I was saying earlier, at the moment you have a situation where perhaps you need a day support service, or a respite service for a person with a disability. The tender goes out and then the tender comes back and it is based on price often. We want to move away from doing that and move to a situation where we know that to provide respite for  $x$  number of people over  $x$  time period costs this. If you are going to staff it properly with your right skill levels and everything, you have to spend this much money per unit to do it properly.

The other thing is, when we put tenders out, we will be comparing like with like in terms of the costs. What we will be looking at is the model of how they will provide that service so that the successful tender will be based on quality of service, not price. So in that gap period between now and when we get on to the unit pricing, unfortunately, the service agreements can only go for that shorter period of time. But I think you are right. I think the points that you make about certainty of funding obviously will make an organisation's work much easier.

**CHAIR** - And obviously continue a commitment of staff.

**Ms THORP** - Absolutely.

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**CHAIR** - If you know that you have got a three-year position rather than a 12-month position.

**Ms THORP** - That is right.

**Ms JACOB** - Can I just add the information that was asked in relation to Ashley overtime? We have that figure for you, if you would like to take it.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, yes.

**Ms JACOB** - The year-to-date figure for 2008-09 is \$249 230 spent on overtime at Ashley.

**Mr FINCH** - So a quarter of a million dollars for the year.

**Ms JACOB** - Yes.

**Mr FINCH** - Just in overtime?

**Ms JACOB** - That is correct, but that is in the context of an overall budget bill of over \$5 million.

**CHAIR** - Of salaries.

**Ms JACOB** - Salaries. So if you look at salaries over-

**Mr FINCH** - Yes. I remember organisations years ago just said, 'No overtime. Plan all your staffing and arrangements to include no overtime.' So I think it is an area, just from these two figures that I have seen, that needs some scrutiny.

**Ms THORP** - Worth examination.

**Mr FINCH** - Absolutely. If we are looking at laying people off, trying to set the figure of 800 people, and Risdon is \$3.8 million, how many people could you hire there-put extra people on, save people working overtime, save people for OH&S reasons?

**Ms THORP** - No, fair point. One of the situations that has some impact on Ashley, of course, is that it is based at Deloraine. So you have a reasonably small population pool.

**CHAIR** - It is only about an hour from Launceston.

**Ms THORP** - True.

**CHAIR** - Or less.

**Ms THORP** - There are reasons why you would use the people you have on overtime rather than create new positions. But anyway, I think you raise a very fair point.

**Mr FINCH** - I imagine they are 12-hour shifts. To me, if you have people there who have really solid, difficult work to do with young people and you get them beyond eight hours and they

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are pulling another four-hour shift, I do not know. Assure me, but I do not think sometimes, through tiredness and fatigue, they are going to be in a fit state to handle situations that may arise.

**Ms THORP** - Yes. I am getting the impression that this size of overtime bill out of a wages budget of nearly \$6 million is not considered excessive, but I think you raise completely valid points about fatigue, the number of positions not starting highly enough. Now that you have raised it with me, I will certainly find out more about it.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - It is probably also important to say that not all of that overtime bill is related to youth workers and staff who are working directly with young people. A significant amount of it is kitchen staff, administrative staff and cleaning staff. So it is not necessarily just the one-on-one youth worker.

**Mr FINCH** - Rosters might need to be looked at so that people do not accrue overtime and you learn to live within your means. If you are able to whack up and include into your average spend an overtime situation, you are going to grow to depend on that.

**CHAIR** - I think the committee was gobsmacked this morning. We are still not quite over the shock.

**Ms THORP** - Fair enough, too. One final point if I may on that: we have no control over the number of kids coming in and when. That requires us to be quite flexible with staff. I am not trying to make an excuse but it is a factor.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I know disabilities is one of your pet projects. I have read in the media release and the notes an increase of \$28 million over four years to deliver long-awaited pay rises to 1 500 disability support workers.

**Ms THORP** - I am absolutely delighted about that.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - There is expenditure relating to additional funding under the National Disability Agreement. The third one is implementation of the reviews and performance by KPMG. I know that I will probably only have to ask one question and get a really solid response, but I would like to put on notice my interest in independent living opportunities for young people with disabilities.

One of the recommendations of the KPMG review was the establishment of regional area networks throughout Tasmania between non-government organisations and Government agencies with an interest in delivery of services to people with disabilities, their families and carers to plan and monitor services. This recommendation was adopted. I just want to know where it is going for 2007-10.

**Ms THORP** - I might ask Aileen Ashford, who is head of the reform unit, to come up to comment.

**Ms ASHFORD** - They are the area advisory groups that I was talking about previously. They will be commencing in July.

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**Mr GAFFNEY** - What is the time frame for them to start? What are some of the recommendations? What is the anticipated time frames for the conversation and then getting back out into the regional communities to enact some of the KPMG report possibilities?

**Ms ASHFORD** - I am not sure. There are a lot of recommendations.

**Ms JACOB** - The recommendations of the KPMG report and the review are being implemented by the reform unit that Aileen was heading up. That is a three-year implementation plan that is rolling out, and we have been very explicit about the activities that are being undertaken over those three years. One of the things which has been created is the government structures which includes the advisory committees both statewide and area level.

The other recommendations include everything from the devolution of services to the non-government sector, the creation of various new service types and creating standards for those service types and so on. Those recommendations are all being gradually implemented by the reform team. There are a whole range of activities that have been going on this year and will be going on into the new year around those reforms. That is the sheet we have given you which outlines some of the things which are going on. So we are not waiting for the advisory committees to be created.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - That is good. Thank you.

[4.00 p.m.]

**Mr DEAN** - I just wonder what consultation or input you had, Minister, into services such as Citizen Advocacy, which operates out of Launceston. I am not sure whether there is an arm here in the south. I do not think there is. Do you have any input into any funding that it might receive?

**Ms THORP** - We do, through an organisation called Create and through Advocacy Tasmania and Speak Out. We fund those.

**Mr DEAN** - Citizen Advocacy receives some State funding.

**Ms JACOB** - So you are asking for how much funding they received?

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, and what other support you give to a group like Citizen Advocacy, which works with people with disabilities, which provides an advocacy service to them, and which works closely with a lot of these people.

**Ms JACOB** - Disability Services funds a number of advocacy organisations. Obviously that is around giving the person with a disability a voice so that their needs can be heard. I know we have a briefing on that. I have not got my fingers on it. I can provide that to you.

**CHAIR** - Minister, we are happy to get that at a later date.

**Ms THORP** - It begins with the Premier's Disability Advisory Council, which is a pretty high-powered body that the Premier chairs and is supported by the disabilities unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. That is pretty significant. I get advice from the minister's Disability Advisory Committee and we meet regularly. We have an agreed action plan about the work they will do. They have a significant role in the Community Equipment Scheme review, for

example, and also in the action plans for different departments, so to look after the needs of people with disability. They are more on a big policy level.

Then you also have the funding that goes to quite independent groups like Create and Advocacy Tasmania to provide those services and to speak out for individual people with disabilities.

**Mr DEAN** - That was going to be my next question. There are a number of these organisations out there. I am just wondering how much we are doing to try to bring them together to really understand exactly what they are all doing and connecting some of them. Citizen Advocacy is sitting here doing its level of work. There is Advocacy Tasmania in another area doing its little bit.

**Ms THORP** - I could not agree with you more, Mr Dean. What we have in Tasmania inevitably are historically different groups that have grown up to represent different groups in the community. We have a plethora of non-government organisations doing a variety of work on behalf of particular client groups. Only recently we commissioned and received a report about peaks review, which is trying to rationalise and make more pragmatic provision of those services. There is a lot of real ownership in the State from the groups that currently exist, and there is no way known we would ever countenance pushing or forcing an amalgamation of any group, but we will encourage partnerships to develop. That is part of the important work of Associate Professor Graham, and it is also a part of the \$200 000 strengthening community organisations initiative that is in this budget. We have not worked out exactly what the guidelines are yet but we are working on them. They will mean that community groups which are providing similar services can come to us and put up a proposal that we pay \$100 000 to work towards a business consultant to come in and say, 'You do this, you do this but you both do this. Why don't you share it?'

It is a really interesting initiative. Funds are made available to assist organisations to identify strategies for achieving efficiencies, to support organisations to change or improve their structure, to help community sector organisations explore opportunities of partnership and to assist organisations to improve their governance or financial systems. So it is going right to the heart of what you are saying. I agree with you, but it is an expensive business sometimes because these organisations are very busy doing their core business. It is difficult to put time aside or move staff aside in order to partner up with one, two or more organisations to create these efficiencies, which might be like sharing admin staff-it could be as simple as that-or having only one telephone service that looks after five or six organisations. We need to get the money to do it.

**Mr DEAN** - Excellent. Well done.

**Mr FINCH** - Minister, I want to get on to the subject of the Community Equipment Scheme. As you know, the Joint Standing Committee on Community Development found that the provision of assisted technology to people with disabilities is in disarray, is underfunded and is in need of major reform. Could you outline what steps the State Government is taking to implement the recommendations of the committee? I know there has been an initial response but we need a bit of detail. This is a big problem for tens of thousands of Tasmanians.

**Ms THORP** - I have a bit of information here I would like to share if I could. The role of the Community Equipment Scheme is to provide funding for aids and appliances, as we know, to eligible Tasmanians to enhance their quality of life and to facilitate discharge from hospital. Human Services's individual support program-that is, through the individual funding unit-

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provides recurrent personal support and/or respite through individualised support packages. From time to time the funds in the IFU may also have the capacity to allocate funding on a one-off basis for personal support or respite or to provide assistance with the purchase of essential equipment or home modification. So that is two parts. The Community Equipment Scheme would also be use of funds through an individual support program. A committee-you are a member of that; that was Community Development, wasn't it?

**Mr FINCH** - I am the chair of it.

**Ms THORP** - That is right. There are a lot of select committees around sometimes. There were 18 recommendations. We have established a steering committee that is going to be co-chaired by Alison Jacob and also Sue Hodgson, who is the chair of that disability advisory committee I mentioned earlier. They are going to oversee the work to be done in response to the report. The steering committee will have an operation group and a cross-jurisdictional policy group to address the recommendations. The operational group has already begun work on the review of the Community Equipment Scheme through the development of an inventory management work plan. The work plan will bring changes to the administration, warehousing, distribution and retrieval processes of the Community Equipment Scheme and, in addition, a centralised database will also enable facts and figures to be captured accurately so they can inform larger scale work and help us plan a way forward. An interim report on the progress of this work will regularly be provided to me through the steering committee, and I am happy to undertake to make sure that that information goes back to Community Development on a regular basis.

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, and of course communicated back out to the providers-

**Ms THORP** - Absolutely.

**Mr FINCH** - and people who are the applicants.

**Ms THORP** - Absolutely. In terms of having the steering committee chaired by Sue Hodgson, who is quite a significant member of the community when it comes to the disability area, she will be making sure that information gets out there. Believe me, whenever I meet with the disability advisory committee I do not think a meeting goes by where the Community Equipment Scheme is not right up there. Alison has just reminded me, quite rightly too, that this is something we are not going to fix overnight. But I just thought you would like to know that there are only limited waiting lists for equipment in the south and the north and no waiting list in the north-west for equipment.

**CHAIR** - So obviously that select committee report has already made progress.

**Ms THORP** - I think it was a really significant piece of work the committee did, because people have been aware I think for a long time of the issues involved with the Community Equipment Scheme. But it has just been one of those issues where you have to say, 'This is such a big mucky problem, how on earth do we tackle it?' The direction provided by the committee has been really helpful in that regard.

**The committee suspended from 4.09 p.m. to 4.23 p.m.**

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**CHAIR** - Thank you, Minister. We welcome you back to the table for the final session. We are going to deal with housing. But I do believe that you have some information that you would like to put on the *Hansard* regarding some figures from the previous output group.

**Ms THORP** - Yes. Mr Dean asked a question about Citizen Advocacy.

**Mr DEAN** - I certainly did.

**Ms JACOB** - We did not provide any money in 2008-09 but in 2007-08 Citizen Advocacy got \$220 000; Advocacy got \$629 000.

**Mr DEAN** - Is that Advocacy Tasmania?

**Ms JACOB** - Advocacy Tasmania.

**Ms THORP** - Speak Out got \$191 000.

**Mr ROBERTS** - It was \$220, not \$220 000.

**CHAIR** - I am glad that was clarified.

**Ms THORP** - And they were agreements that were agreed to through the Office of the Community Sector.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, Minister.

### 3.4 Housing Services-

**Ms THORP** - Once again, one of the people I work with has provided a fact sheet about social and affordable housing for your information, which I will not read.

**CHAIR** - Thank you, Minister.

**Ms THORP** - But it might help you form questions.

**CHAIR** - If there are one or two key points, I am happy for you to put those on the *Hansard*, but other than that we will move to questions.

**Ms THORP** - In that case, I will let you know that the key achievements of the Housing Innovations Unit were the construction of 50 affordable Quick Build homes on Tasmanian government-owned land to sell to low- to moderate-income households; the administration of the National Rent Affordability Scheme, which is a joint initiative of both the State and Australian governments-and, in 2008-09, funding for the construction of 587 new homes was approved under this scheme; and we have completed an audit of vacant land owned by the Tasmanian Government. There is a lot more to get to and I am sure we will get to it through questions.

**Mr DEAN** - I have been talking to the member for Elwick and he says that there is nothing really to query.

**Ms THORP** - I find that very, very hard to believe.



**Mr DEAN** - He has given me about 65 questions. No. I have asked this question previously but I will ask it again. How will the redundancy package that the Government has put forward impact on you in this area of Housing Tasmania? And what will be the impact on you of the other savings that have to be made?

**Mr ROBERTS** - There are a number of things that we are doing. I think the first thing to raise with the committee is that we are looking at our savings agenda across the whole portfolio. We are not specifically targeting bits of Health or Human Services; we are trying to take in the round. That is going to be better for us, particularly as this is a three-year program of savings. As we have got so much reform going on in this phase, much of which you are hearing about, we want to try to protect as much of that reform work and then the benefits of that will flow to us in later years to enable us to see where we are going.

But, in terms of the head count which you have raised, there are essentially three numbers that are important here. There are the five SES posts that we have to save. We have in fact done that now. We have identified those posts and they will be removed by 30 June. So that is done and dusted and we can move on. I think that is important -

**Mr DEAN** - Sorry, five SES positions?

**Mr ROBERTS** - Yes, senior executive positions. We have identified those and they have been or will be removed from-

**Mr DEAN** - Where are they? What area of the State Department?

**Mr ROBERTS** - We are taking out a deputy secretary post, State-wide system development; a departmental finance post, SES 3; a director of resource assistant performance in the department, SES 1; director of education and training, SES 1-that is in the Human Services area-and a director of youth justice from the Human Services area as well. Those posts, as I say, if they haven't gone now they will go by the 30th and therefore we can now say to SES, 'Your bit is done. We can now move on.'

**Mr DEAN** - Is that by way of vacancies in those areas or redundancies, or just how is that achieved?

**Mr ROBERTS** - Vacancies coming up and holding them or voluntary expressions of interest for amalgamations. Much of what we are doing is because the reform agenda is changing the way we are doing things and we are taking those opportunities to take command. We did not know that there would be a need for us to save funds this year, although we suspected some months ago that that would be the case, so we as an agency have been trying to hold on to our vacancies and also predict where vacancies might come up or savings might be needed.

We are trying to apply that same approach to the 66 general management posts, which was also part of the Premier's announcement about general savings. The actual Department of Health has identified 34 posts it is going to put up for-again under the same sets of principles during the course of next year, which will leave us with another 32 posts to identify across the whole agency. Then the difference between those two numbers and the 250, which is the published head count reduction for the whole agency, is what we have then to find.

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Of that total number we think 30 will need to come from within Human Services. Thirty-five will come from the department and the remainder will come from Health, which I know is not an issue for you here today but it just shows you that we are trying to work across the whole agency rather than specifically in areas.

I have already spoken to the unions about our approach to this and they are entirely comfortable. Because we are very steadily now devolving the structure of the department. As you probably heard, we split Health into areas to match up with the areas in Human Services. We have already a very devolved accountability structure within Human Services. The same thing is happening within Health. We want the responsibility for these savings to come from front-line staff. They are by far and away the very best people to identify whether we are doing jobs and have tasks being performed that we can do away with, whether there are functions that we can merge or change. We do not want to get into a situation where we are making a post redundant-not that there is any compulsory redundancy in this-and then just passing the duties or responsibilities on to others. That is not what this is about. Alison is in the process of devolving those 30 posts-which I have asked Alison to find-to her various managers, all of whom you have heard or some of whom you have seen today. Mercia will get a proportion of those posts to find.

We are working on the basis that the whole of the agency turns over in two months the total amount of staff that we have to save here. Our turnover in two months is about 200, 250 people. So if you take over a period-

**Mr DEAN** - That is across-

**Mr ROBERTS** - That is across the whole of the Department of Health and Human Services.

**Mr DEAN** - Health and Human Services. You turn over that many each month?

**Mr ROBERTS** - Yes.

**Ms THORP** - Because they are a separate core of people.

**Mr ROBERTS** - Every two months.

**Mr DEAN** - Every two months.

**Mr ROBERTS** - It is about 100 a month. So our view is, with that level of just natural turnover, we should be able to deal with this issue, given long enough to deal with that. The union's view was that they would like to see any voluntary redundancies dealt with in the first three months and we have argued with them that we do not want to see an approach where we take out jobs just because we have to hit a target in a three-month period. We would much rather have a look at how our reforms are going and how we can sensitively identify posts over a period of time. We do not have to just lose 250 people in one go. We have a target over a period of time to actually reduce our head count by that.

**Mr DEAN** - What is the time period? That is what I was going to ask the Minister. What is the time period, Minister, for you to shed those numbers of people or to make that saving?

**Ms THORP** - I will defer to you, if I may.

**Mr ROBERTS** - It is in the next 12 months, so we do anticipate, in order to meet our financial obligations, reducing our head count by that within 12 months. However, what I would say is I am also leaving responsibility with people like Alison and her team to identify alternatives to saving posts. So if they can come up with something really clever and innovative, an accelerated piece of reform, then I am very comfortable with that. What I am very mindful of, though, is that we do not know the long-term effects of the global financial crisis. We have forward estimates which are to be understood today, but if the global financial crisis gets worse then presumably we will have to reappraise ourselves of that. If it gets better then I would hope that we would be talking to Government about either easing that burden or improving that burden.

The other thing I need to emphasise in this portfolio-and it is a difficult message that we have struggled with across the portfolio-is selling a message to our staff and the public that, on the one hand, there are revenue dollars which are constrained because of the global financial crisis but we actually have substantial stimulus funding coming in. In the Housing portfolio we are talking about here, there is \$120 million or \$130 million which we have to spend in a short period of time. That will require management-

**Ms THORP** - That means people.

**Mr ROBERTS** - And that will require us to put posts in to manage the agenda.

**Mr DEAN** - Can you address that now, because that was my next question. What sort of staff are you going to need to manage that extra stimulus money that is coming in from the Commonwealth Government? How are you going to manage that if you are talking about shedding responsibility or positions?

**Ms THORP** - One of the big priorities for us has been making sure that we do everything we can to maximise the benefit we get for Tasmania from the stimulus dollars that are out there and available because in most cases they have not just been, 'Okay, Tassie, this is your share.' There might be a notional amount there, but the States have had to demonstrate that if the money was given to us we could spend it well and spend it quickly and with the reform agendas in place that the Commonwealth wants. Bernadette might explain what she has been doing and that will probably explain that.

[4.30 p.m.]

**Ms JAGO** - When the economic stimulus package was announced, the Commonwealth Government put in place social housing coordinators both at the national level and in each jurisdiction. That is my role in Housing in Tasmania. The main task is to deliver on the stimulus package. It transfers to about \$150 million over the next few years in stimulus money. Part of the early money was about \$9.4 million in repairs and maintenance over two years and we delivered on the first of that money, and there is \$4 million next year to deliver. The other part was \$16 million from the ESP fund. This year it was a series of purchases and next year it is about \$15 million in new constructs.

The main part of the stimulus package is ESP 2, and we have just been through a funding round for ESP 2. The way we have divided that is that we went to the not-for-profit sector and encouraged people to apply for new supply and also to nominate whether they were interested in the reform of public housing into the future. The other part is that we went to industry and they had the opportunity to bid for the dollars and put up new supply. The third part was State priorities in terms of new supply that we wanted to deliver on. So we are at the point now of

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going through that tender process. There is a Commonwealth commitment that if we have that information to them by 30 June-so it is a really tight turnaround-they will let people know by the end of August whether people have been successful or not.

**Mr DEAN** - Thank you very much. The next question is in relation to category waiting lists. Where are we with the lists for category 1, 2 and 3? I think they are still the same categories, and you will tell me if I am wrong, obviously. The other question I will ask at the same time is: how quickly are these lists building with new applicants? How many new applicants are we getting, say, per week? If you could relate that to an area, I would appreciate that as well.

**Ms THORP** - There were 3 007 applicants on the wait list at the end of April 2009.

**Mr DEAN** - That is across the State?

**Ms THORP** - Across the State. Of these, 286 were unprocessed because we were waiting on more information. About 11 per cent of those are category 1. Of those, there were 140 in the south-west, 18 in the south-east, 62 in the north and 48 in the north-west. Just on 40 per cent were category 2; 810 were category 3; and 409 were category 4-with a demographic split around the State, which you would expect.

**Mr DEAN** - Are those numbers dropping off compared with this time last year?

**Ms THORP** - The public housing waiting list has declined by 11 per cent since reaching its peak of 3 382 in February 2005. I would not like to mislead you in any shape or form-

**CHAIR** - I was going to say, because that is different information than I have.

**Mr FINCH** - Where do they get 2 700 -

**Ms THORP** - Since 2005.

**Mr FINCH** - On the waiting list? There are currently 2 700 on the waiting list?

**Ms THORP** - No, 3 700.

**Mr FINCH** - 3 007, did I hear?

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - I think there is a difference between what we call the active waiting list and the total waiting list. The minister has referred to some which are still being processed. So people apply, and in order to be housed you have to provide proof of income, proof of identity and sometimes medical records and bits of pieces. So we would have a number of people whom we call 'active' on the waiting list and others who are still providing information are in the process. That is the total wait list. So the 3 007 is the total wait list and the 2 724 is the active waiting list.

**Mr DEAN** - Active, right.

**Ms THORP** - The total is 3 007. That is all of the categories plus the unprocessed.

**Mr DEAN** - I knew I could get the figures for last year and check that against last year.

**Ms THORP** - The peak was back in 2005 and it has declined 11 per cent since then. I do not want to paint an artificially rosy picture here. We have a few factors working at the same time. People are staying in public housing longer. They are not coming and going. We do not have the churn. We have an occupancy rate of about 98 per cent.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - 98.9 per cent.

**Ms THORP** - 98.9 per cent. So people are staying in the houses that they are currently living in and they are not moving on. That means your opportunity to house someone who goes onto the waiting list is somewhat diminished, as you could imagine. With the global financial crisis now and also the housing boom of a couple of years back, that meant for a lot of people that private rental became really expensive. So they put their names down for public housing. I do not think we are going to see a major decrease in that figure any time soon.

**Mr DEAN** - My question, then, is what is the trend over the last two to three weeks? Minister, I was given information the other day that between the period 15 to 19 June in Launceston-that one week- there were about 100 or so new applications for Housing Tasmania homes. I want to confirm whether that is right. If it is, why are we getting those large numbers? That to me would seem like a fairly large number coming in during one week-100. Where are those applications coming from? Are they young people, people who cannot get other accommodation, people who have been kicked out of accommodation? What is creating it?

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - The information that we prepared for estimates we did at a certain date to make sure that we were all counting from the same rule, and that was the end of April. So if you have a question about what has happened over May, I have not actually immediately got that. I am very happy to follow that up.

**Mr DEAN** - I would like to know between the period of 15 and 19 June the numbers in Launceston.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - Sure. I am very happy to do that. We just have to call a cut-off date for our data.

**Mr DEAN** - I want to know if that is consistent throughout the State.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - It is true that we do tend to get a bit of a lift in the waiting lists around winter. That is not an atypical pattern, but I will get the exact May figures.

**Mr DEAN** - If that were right-and I am going off the information I was given-is that a fairly large number? Is that consistent with what is happening weekly or monthly?

**Ms THORP** - I could not really answer that until I have seen the information to have it verified -

**Mr DEAN** - It seems like a large number to me.

**Ms THORP** - whether it is accurate or not. We will take that on notice and get that in detail for you.

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**Mr DEAN** - I would appreciate information on where these people are coming from, whether it is young people.

**Ms THORP** - I am more than happy to do that, as long as the data can be interrogated to get that information.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - We ask a range of questions about what their current living conditions are. Sometimes it gives you a level of detail that you want and other times it does not. They might say they are living with relatives; they might say they have just come from interstate; they might say they are in private rental. So it would be at a fairly high level.

**Ms THORP** - But we are happy to get it for you.

**Mr DEAN** - I have millions of questions.

**CHAIR** - I know.

**Mr DEAN** - Can I ask one more?

**CHAIR** - You can ask one more and then Mr Finch wants to ask one in this same area.

**Mr DEAN** - I am talking about affordable housing now. A group called Fusion is involved with providing affordable housing in Tasmania. I think they have a project at Poatina, haven't they?

**Ms THORP** - Yes, I have been up there.

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, I understand they are looking at a number of other projects with Housing Tasmania. That is agreed?

**Ms THORP** - Yes.

**Mr DEAN** - What is the position there with housing?

**Mr WHITE** - We are close to having agreement with Fusion, looking at some vacant land at Rocherlea around Caladenia Court. We have started looking into getting approval of the developments. I think it is approximately 30 lots-I do not have this in front of me, but they are looking to have 50 units developed.

**Mr DEAN** - Just so as not to mislead you, Minister. They did broach this with me and that is why I am asking the question.

**Mr WHITE** - What we are looking to do-obviously we still have to work through a lot of issues in terms of community consultation, getting planning approvals et cetera and then ultimately constructing, but we are looking to make the land available. They intend to have some of those units they will sell to people eligible under our home ownership schemes. In addition, they are looking to retain some as affordable rental accommodation and provide communal facilities, community facilities, on site and hook up with, for example, Brooks High School to do some training and these sorts of things. So we had approval from the minister to come to this arrangement.

In terms of the land price et cetera, some of the land potentially that is provided for social rental would probably come under the National Rental Affordability Scheme. That will be donated as the State's contribution to that scheme. The other parcels of land, if sold, will come out of the share-lease scheme. Therefore, the land cost will be recouped in the future by the director as those purchasers on-sell the property.

**Mr DEAN** - Thank you.

**Ms THORP** I think it was in December we went to see them, wasn't it? At that meeting they raised some of these ideas and we gave them an undertaking that they could have a dialogue with the Department through the Housing Innovations Unit to see if their ideas could be progressed. Alison took charge of that and now here we are in June and it is looking very, very positive.

**Mr DEAN** - Thanks.

**CHAIR** - I will pass over now to Mr Finch who wanted to explore the previous question, I believe.

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, I have been interrogating-

**CHAIR** - The data.

[4.45 p.m.]

**Mr FINCH** - Yes, if you look at the performance information, which is table 5.8 on page 5.22, it shows a public housing occupancy rate of close to 100 per cent for the next four years.

**Ms THORP** - Yes.

**Mr FINCH** - The waiting list is hovering around 2 700 applicants-2 733-so it is approximately around that area. I cannot help feeling that Housing Tasmania is failing. We have increased wait time, we have an increasing waiting list, we have a high occupancy rate and fewer housing allocations. Is that not all an indication of failure?

**Ms THORP** - No, I completely disagree with you there. We have a stock of houses. We have about 12 000 houses in this State and 98.9 per cent of them have families living in them at a very affordable rent which is matched to their income. We are providing that service very, very well. Those houses are looked after. They are maintained by Housing Tasmania. Now, there are always going to be people who require-

**Mr FINCH** - 2 733.

**Ms THORP** - Yes, but that number of people are not homeless people. They are not people living in tents. A lot of these people are people who are paying, for example, high rents in the private rental market and they think that they would be better off if they were able to access public housing.

**Mr FINCH** - And a lot would be under the pump right now.

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**Ms THORP** - A lot of them would be, true, and they would be mixed households. I am aware of somebody who just spoke casually to me yesterday where a grandmother, a daughter and a young child have been living together for about three years. The grandmother has had enough and the daughter is going to put her name down on the public housing waiting list to get a house. If we just sat there and said, 'The only answer to affordable and social housing in this State is to get every penny we can and keep building more and more and more houses,' we are doomed. This is recognised nationally and it is recognised internationally.

We have to get a lot more innovative about how we provide houses, not just buying more and more stock. This is what I call a 1960s paradigm, where back then we went out and we had all these acres and acres of land and we built hundreds of houses and the result was social problems that went with them. We are not doing that anymore. We have to look at housing along a continuum, from home ownership down to homelessness. At the home ownership end we have got to do everything we can to encourage private home ownership. That is why things like the first home buyer grant is such a good thing. That is why we are doing things like the Home Share Equity Scheme, to help people get into their own houses. Then we need to expand the availability of private rental stock, which is why the National Rental Affordability Scheme is so important. Under that, a developer can apply and if they are successful they build their houses, the State pays the equivalent of \$2 000 a year, the Commonwealth pays \$6 000 a year and the developer agrees that for a 10-year period they will rent that place out at 80 per cent of market value and make it available to low- to moderate-income people. So that is where that period comes in.

We also to make sure that the stock portfolio we have reflects the needs of the people who are applying. We still have a variety of stock that is not appropriate for the applications we get. Our household size is getting smaller. Where you could have perhaps six people living in a three-bedroom house 10 years ago, you have now got maybe a single mum and one child and we have still got too many three-bedroom houses. So we have to work on that configuration as well.

We also have a lot of stock like small bedsit units that were built back in the sixties and seventies that are not appropriate for the kind of amenity we want to provide anymore, so we have to put the time and effort into making sure they are okay. Then we need accommodation in the supported accommodation area for people who have disabilities or other social needs that they need support for. Plus we have to provide crisis accommodation. Plus we have to provide facilities for homelessness. So to just look at the housing situation and say, 'If we have waiting lists and we do not have enough houses we are failing,' I completely refute.

**Mr FINCH** - I find the figures that have been revealed here very worrying, though. We had a high in 2005 of 3 300. We are on the way back up again. We now have 3 007 applicants. I am just thinking of those people who are out there who aspire, who want to share in this program, who want to have their situation alleviated wherever they are. That is why they are coming to you for help-3 007 applicants. They are sitting out there just waiting for that support and help. I hope you do not lose too many staff, because it sounds as though they have got a hell of a lot of work to do in the near future.

**Ms THORP** - Housing Tas do a lot of work in supporting people in public housing through tenancy support and the maintenance that goes into the properties. People are not just put in a house and left to their own devices. It forms a very important part, I would say, of the work that Housing Tas does, if you would like to elaborate a bit.



**Ms JAGO** - No, I can only reiterate what you are saying, Minister. The need is the need. We are in a time when the cost of housing, the price of housing and the incomes that people have got available to them has created a great deal of housing stress and a housing shortage, and that is reflected in the waitlist. Nevertheless, in response to that-we are never going to get rid of a waitlist; there is always going to be a need for people to have housing-the challenge is how you can find the right housing for that family or that individual at the right time depending on their need. For a long time we had a concentration in public housing, and the minister is accurate in saying that what we are trying to do is diversify the choices of all these housing contingents so it is not reliance just on public housing.

In fact, you have heard about the large dollars that are coming our way-\$130 million from the Commonwealth. That is all tied to a massive reform agenda. Part of that reform agenda is to diversify the choices that are available for low-income people. One of the strategies there is to grow the not-for-profit sector that is able to leverage additional dollars from debt off their asset base. So there is a whole range of strategies in place at the moment to try to diversify supply, increase supply, get more providers and a range of choices to meet a range of needs.

**Mr FINCH** - Because of those national programs that we have got, the remote indigenous housing and the homelessness national partnership agreements, those sorts of things, I am not trusting; I am just hoping that the government is playing its part as strongly as it should be.

**Ms THORP** - Yes, and our plan is to have 2 000 new housing stock over the next four to five years. That will go a long way to alleviating those problems. We would not fix the problem if we just concentrated on building more public housing stock. We have to be much more creative than that, I think it is fair to say.

**CHAIR** - Minister, is TAHL on track to deliver its additional 300 affordable homes by the end of 2009-10?

**Ms THORP** - TAHL now has a total of 71 homes occupied and it has another 432 homes in the pipeline. TAHL has experienced some time lags.

**CHAIR** - I think we have heard that for the last three years, since I have been sitting here.

**Ms THORP** - Yes. We still have issues, but the people on the board are committed and they are working very, very hard-

**CHAIR** - I appreciate that, but I guess you would appreciate that we are the ones listening to these people because we usually give them the Housing Tasmania number. We are the ones who see them first of all at our offices and around-

**Ms THORP** - But you are clear that I actually have no control over TAHL.

**CHAIR** - I understand that, but obviously it is born out of the need.

**Ms THORP** - We want to see them succeed, and they have the potential to deliver about 700 new affordable homes. It may not be as quickly as we initially thought it would perhaps be but, as I said, they have 71 occupied and another 432 homes in the pipeline. I think 131 of them are due for completion in 2009-10. It is a bit of a slow start, but they have built some momentum.

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**CHAIR** - So they will not have 300. The report *Your Health and Human Services: Progress Chart* of May 2009 says that an additional 300 affordable homes are planned by the end of 2009-10.

**Ms THORP** - There are 432 in the pipeline, 71 occupied and another 131 due for completion in 2009-10. They are my most up-to-date figures.

**CHAIR** - It is probably not as accurate.

**Ms THORP** - Sometimes things happen, too, such as when a work plan or business plan is developed that relies on being able to access a particular site and get a development application approved and then that falls over. Hopkins Street was a classic example of a site that TAHL were going to use but for a variety of reasons were unable to, so we have now basically taken that back and are doing something alternative on it. Remind me of what we are doing on Hopkins Street?

**Mr WHITE** - We are looking to develop that under the stimulus package.

**Ms THORP** - That is right. It is a fantastic site. It is right next to the Moonah 24/7 medical centre and in a quiet, internal block near services. It will be absolutely ideal for older people and young mums with children, because it will all be flat plan access and all that kind of thing and close to services.

**CHAIR** - The way we are going, though, they will be out of their prams by the time it gets a house on the ground.

**Ms THORP** - No, we are building Hopkins Street.

**CHAIR** - Are you then telling me that Housing Tasmania can put houses on the ground a lot quicker than TAHL?

**Ms THORP** - They have different arrangements. They are about head leasing properties and renting them. We can provide housing in a variety of ways which their terms of agreement do not cover.

**CHAIR** - So they are not hitting the mark?

**Ms THORP** - I think that is something we will need to look at into the future because, as I said, they have a constitution which they work under and this was all devised well before we knew all the stimulus money was going to be available. When we get closer to looking at our reform process of public housing, rejigging the way TAHL works may be a part of that, but I would not want to pre-empt that until we know where we are going with the housing.

**CHAIR** - And putting TAHL back into Housing Tasmania.

**Ms THORP** - I do not know, because we are looking at a major reform of public housing. As you know, KPMG have been involved for some time with the modelling and coming up with the report, which we hope will be around in early July. Since the draft report came out in December last year, the stakeholders-like Shelter Tasmania, Anglicare, Colony 47 and others-have formed a working group that has been chaired by Alison to go through all the issues that were raised when they had a look at the draft, such as risk management, rent setting,

grandfathering of existing tenants and a whole lot of issues they were concerned about. Everyone sat down around the table and worked those through one by one.

They have been able to inform KPMG's work so that when we get the FaCS report it should hopefully have ticked off on all of the concerns that the stakeholder groups, the not-for-profits here in Tasmania, had. The feedback I am getting is that they are very happy, particularly with the dignity given to them, if you like, about them being real participants in the process.

**CHAIR** - I will look forward to an increase in numbers. Can I now move on to supported accommodation? I have the May progress chart, which tells me that there are 30 people on the supported accommodation waiting list for people with a disability. Is that the correct number? What is the quantum for supported accommodation?

**Ms JACOB** - What is in the progress chart is actually talking about supported accommodation for people with a disability. So that is a particular cohort-

**CHAIR** - So you can you give me the total?

**Ms JACOB** - I suppose it depends what you mean by 'supported accommodation' more generally. Are you talking more generally or are you talking in terms of disability?

**Ms THORP** - There is supported accommodation for people with drug and alcohol problems and all sorts of things.

**CHAIR** - So there is a broad umbrella of supported accommodation, and that splits into disability services and the other areas you have talked about.

**Ms THORP** - That is right.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - We do have a program called the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, which is directed specifically at people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Then there is a range of other programs that we deliver which are methods of supported accommodation-as you say, for disability, mental health or drug and alcohol. It used to be called the SAAP program for the homeless and then other supported options depending on-

**CHAIR** - Do we have a need for supported accommodation across all areas in Tasmania?

**Ms THORP** - One of the significant things that is influencing what we are doing there is the target that we have to halve the homelessness numbers by the end of next year, which is 188 places. We are going to do that by providing sites, if you like, and group sites-I think we are planning five new services-and also by individual purchase and construction of units for people. We currently own about 180 properties around the State. They are for supported accommodation. They include the disability group homes, family group homes and out-of-home care for young people. So there is a real variety. Some of the services are delivered by the department and some by NGOs under funding agreements.

[5.00 p.m.]

**CHAIR** - So you do have partnerships?

**Ms THORP** - Heavens, yes. We also have established an accommodations options team that is undertaking long-term integrated capital planning for supported accommodation right across Human Services.

**Ms JACOB** - One of the benefits of Human Services working together is that we have been able to look at all of our sites-the ones that we use in children and family services, the ones that we use in disability services, the ones that we use in out-of-home care-to see whether they were fit for purpose for the particular clients who were in them or whether they would have been better suited to another group. We have sold some, we have maintained some, we have upgraded some and we have swapped groups according to where they were and so forth. So we are trying to get the best benefit from those 180 houses that we actually own or lease. The supported accommodation unit is making sure that we are getting good value for money as far as those assets are concerned.

**CHAIR** - Minister, I get the message that we do need additional supported accommodation.

**Ms THORP** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - So can you tell me why you, as minister, have pulled out of negotiations with Jadwan, who is offering 27 places for supported accommodation and has been in the process with the department for 20 Fitzroy Place since January 2006?

**Ms THORP** - It is a significant question and I would like to answer it.

**CHAIR** - I would appreciate that because it is a significant issue. If my understanding is entirely correct, they were almost at the last hurdle and then it has all gone pear-shaped.

**Ms THORP** - I will explain it to you. Our Government announced in March 2006 its intention to establish in Fitzroy Place-Star Street, Sandy Bay a supported residential facility. The property is an old heritage listed building which previously operated as an aged-care facility. The property is currently vacant and has not been occupied since the closing of the aged-care service some 15 years ago. The site is in a good location. It is close to services and within walking distance of the Hobart CBD.

**CHAIR** - With planning approval?

**Ms THORP** - Yes. The reoccupation of the site as a supported residential facility would have provided a win-win result for the owners and for Housing Tasmania clients. It would also have seen the long-term vacant building back in the use of the community. The success of this project was always dependent on the owners of the property, Jadwan Pty Ltd, obtaining planning approval for a change of use to allow a boarding house style facility to operate from the premises. In November 2006 after a very lengthy process, the owners were successful in achieving this result, for which we are very grateful. The project was also dependent upon the owners and Housing Tasmania agreeing on reasonable terms and conditions for a lease agreement. Due to the age and poor condition of the building, those terms and conditions have to take into account a number of factors including the current condition of the building, the level and cost of upgrading required, the length of a lease, the rental cost, the responsibilities of the owner and lessee for the immediate upgrading costs and future development costs over the course of a lease.

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Unfortunately, and following a very lengthy negotiation process, the parties could not agree to the necessary terms and conditions required for that lease agreement and Housing Tasmania has now determined that it must move forward, has ceased all new negotiations and will consider other options for the establishment of this supported residential facility. Supported residential facilities provide medium- to long-term stable accommodation for low-income Tasmanians who have low-level support needs and a desire to live in a communal environment. There are already three existing facilities successfully operating in the State-one each in Burnie, Prospect and Claremont. Each of these facilities is operated by Anglicare and it is expected that a fourth facility will also be operated by Anglicare and be located in the greater Hobart area. The current three facilities offer a total of 96 accommodation places and, as at June this year, 93 were occupied.

**CHAIR** - So that is all superfluous to what we are talking about in this particular instance, so I still do not get from that-

**Ms THORP** - If you still do not get it-

**CHAIR** - Not that I do not get it. I get it, but I do not get from that information why, when you were so close to coming to an agreement-and I believe that there was someone who was helping negotiate through this; there were only two more steps to go in such a long process where there are 27 accommodation areas available-

**Ms THORP** - I can see where you are coming from. I became minister in September and became aware very soon thereafter-

**CHAIR** - You have been involved, Minister.

**Ms THORP** - after a meeting with Julie Alexander as the representative of Jadwan that there were frustrations on both sides, both with Housing Tasmania and with Jadwan, in that they were not able to come up with an agreement that both were happy with. So I think Mercia at that stage gave what was almost like a directive: 'Please sit down with Jadwan and sort this one out.' That was attempted. There was no way of knowing that the terms and conditions could not be agreed by both parties. I am trying to get my dates right here, but I wrote as minister I think in November of last year and said, 'This has gone on for too long. I want to bring this round of negotiations to an end, but please feel free to resubmit another suggestion.' That is what has been going on basically since then.

John Ramsay, the former head of Health and Human Services, has been acting as a negotiator/mediator in this process, and we still have not got there basically. I have a need to get these places up and running. So when you get to a point where the negotiations just are not succeeding where one side will not agree, you have to call a halt at some stage and just get on with the business of exploring other options, and that is what we are doing.

**Mr WING** - How close did you get to agreement?

**Ms THORP** - Not very close at all actually-not to a lease that Housing Tasmania felt in the least bit comfortable with signing, and all along through this process we took advice from Crown Law.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**CHAIR** - My understanding is that Jadwan was accepting of the processes that you had outlined, so-

**Ms THORP** - The lease made available to us from Jadwan was never acceptable to Housing Tasmania in that form.

**CHAIR** - So this seems to be another communication-

**Ms THORP** - It is a real disappointment. It is a big disappointment because it was quite a controversial case, if you remember, about getting the planning permission from the Hobart City Council to be able to have this facility.

**CHAIR** - You said yourself it is in a really good area.

**Ms THORP** - No disagreement about that whatsoever, but I can absolutely assure this committee that every effort has been made on the part of Human Services and specifically through Housing Tasmania to bring this to a good conclusion, and it has not been possible. So we have ceased negotiations and we will now look at other proposals.

**CHAIR** - Minister, would you, if the Jadwan company is of a mind, seeing that they have accepted the process that is being followed, re-enter negotiations in the interests of providing supported accommodation?

**Ms THORP** - At this stage I would rather work on projects that I have more confidence of success.

**CHAIR** - I guess they will take a lot longer to put on the ground than this would have -

**Ms THORP** - Oh no, there are quite a few things happening now.

**Ms JAGO** - Under the stimulus package there are a number of proposals in the CBD area of Hobart for homelessness facilities. Unfortunately, because we are in the tender process, we are not able to divulge some of the detail. As I mentioned earlier, 30 June is the deadline for us to get the recommendations to the Commonwealth and they have given an undertaking that they will make public their support or approve the recommendations by the end of August.

**CHAIR** - But none of these would have planning approval at this point in time? I know there are some areas of fast track, but if they are in a CBD area they still have to have community consultation.

**Ms THORP** - We already have development application approval.

**CHAIR** - Do you have DAs in for them as well?

**Ms JAGO** - For some; not for some under the ESP. The minister has announced the Liverpool Street site.

**Ms THORP** - That is 45 units and that is a new one.

**CHAIR** - It will be interesting to see, Minister, how many are on the ground when we come back next year.

**Ms THORP** - That is right. That was one of the frustrations we experience and we needed to move ahead.

**CHAIR** - From the outside, and not being in amongst the negotiations, I have to say that that is very disappointing, to say the least.

**Ms THORP** - I think it is fair to say there is disappointment on both sides, but I can once again confirm that every effort has been made.

**CHAIR** - Would you consider every effort has been made on both sides, from both parties?

**Ms THORP** - Absolutely, they just were not able to agree.

**CHAIR** - So there is goodwill missing somewhere?

**Ms THORP** - Oh no, from my experience I think the negotiations have always been done in a very fair, frank, open and respectful manner. John Ramsay has been taking that mediator/intermediary role since Christmas time, so we have tried very hard.

**CHAIR** - I expect with a level of frustration, but I do not have that in writing.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Minister, I am pleased you mentioned the disability group home situation. Young people want independence and they want to live in a young community. And young people with disabilities want independence and to live in a young community as well. What projects or initiatives are there through Housing and Disability Services that will provide young people with disabilities with support with other people of similar ages so that it makes it a lot more attractive to be involved with that?

**Ms JACOB** - I think what you raise is really important. I think up until fairly recently when accommodation for people with disabilities was required they immediately went to group homes and that was the only option available for them. For many people with disabilities that was either very unappealing or it might have been a level of support that was much more than they needed. We did an accommodations options project last year where we really looked at what sort of accommodation was needed, what the new range of accommodation was that people with disabilities were looking for, and what was affordable. Keeping people in group homes is a very expensive thing to do. Our first priority would be to keep people in their own homes or in their family home whenever that can happen. If we are able to provide support that allows people to stay in their own home, that is the best thing we can possibly do.

There are other things that we are also putting on the ground now such as supported tenancy models. For example, in Burnie we have a proposal that has happened this year, where we have been able to take over a unit facility and we have put a lead tenant into one of the units and people with disabilities into the other units. The person who has the lead tenant role is able to provide the support over the critical times of the day when meals are being prepared, showers taken and that kind of thing. They are there to give a helping hand, to provide support, give assistance at the times when the person needs it but at other times the person with a disability is able to be in their

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own unit and live quite independently, which is obviously much better for them and much more cost-effective for us.

We are looking increasingly at a range of models. Another model in Disability Services that we are really keen on is one where there are cluster units. There might well be support that is provided centrally within a cluster of accommodation but each of the people with disabilities is able to live independently in some sort of cluster arrangement around that. Again, it is looking much more sensibly at the level of support that people need and providing what they need and not more than that.

**CHAIR** - St Michael's is a good example.

**Ms JACOB** - St Michael's is a good example of that, yes.

**Ms THORP** - They have just opened some units at St Michael's which are stunning. They are enabling young men and women, mainly in their 20s and 30s who have been at home with family and now want to be living independently - they are really attractive. I have some photographs in my office and I will show you, if you like.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I know that local governments and local councils are submitting projects that will have a very mixed range of intense housing to decrease the carbon footprint, but also ensure that there is a good mix of all different types of housing. I think that is going to be very successful.

**Ms THORP** - It is more reflective of community, too.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - It may also be worth mentioning that we have a particular Commonwealth program for taking young people who are inappropriately housed in aged-care facilities out of those facilities and more appropriately housed. We have \$1.4 million in the next financial year to provide six places.

**Ms THORP** - And that is being built now, and should be completed by Christmas.

**CHAIR** - Where is the location, Minister?

[5.15 p.m.]

**Ms THORP** - Chigwell. That is six young people who are currently living in aged-care facilities. They know they are getting these homes and they are very excited about it.

**CHAIR** - And the north-west, when is that one identified for?

**Ms THORP** - When we did this project there were some people who were identified as needing to stay in an aged-care facility, such was the level of their support needs. Then there was the group that was in the residential facility and needed to be moved out - and that is the six, is it not?

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - Being only involved on the capital side, I am not quite clear where those six are coming from.



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**Ms THORP** - And then there are other projects that are going on to support people to stay in their own places rather than to have to go into aged-care facilities.

**Ms JACOB** - The one I just spoke about, for those 12 people who need accommodation in that semi-independent model, will be completed by July this year. That is a different project from the young people in residential aged-care, which is obviously those people who need a much higher level of support, and that is due for completion by the end of the year.

**Ms THORP** - They are only the south, but I am not aware of any projects going on in the north or the north-west. I will check for you, but I do not think so.

**Ms JACOB** - Not in relation to young people in residential aged-care, but in terms of accommodation for people with disabilities, that one I spoke about is in the north-west.

**CHAIR** - And the north?

**Ms JACOB** - Again, we could give you a breakdown of the options of this region, if that would be useful?

**CHAIR** - Thank you, it would be useful.

**Ms THORP** - I think 18 of the new supported accommodation places that have been provided have been on the north-west because that is where the biggest need was identified, whereas the needs in other areas were not as critical. There is a lot of interest from the north and north-west under the next round of the economic stimulus package, which will be sent off on 30 June. I think I have a briefing on Monday about that. That will go off and then hopefully the Commonwealth will approve the projects that we have put up. Once we have that approval, it will be exciting to let people know what is happening and where.

**Mr DEAN** - I want to take this opportunity to thank Housing Tasmania for the work they did in relocating Tammy Lowe, a lady with six children who deposited them on the steps of Family Services and left them there. It was a wonderful result, a new home. She is absolutely delighted and spent hours telling Don and myself about it.

**CHAIR** - Is she in your electorate, Mr Dean?

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, she is in my electorate now. Mr Wing was able to get her a house in my electorate.

*Laughter.*

**Ms THORP** - That is called being helpful, isn't it.

I would like to take the opportunity to commend the work of Housing Tasmania. It is often tough. People ring up and say, 'I need a house now' or they drive past a house and see it vacant and think, 'I want that one there'. The pressure that the staff of Housing Tasmania comes under when they are dealing with clients, who are often in distress or concerned, is enormous and they do a fantastic job and all credit to Mercia for that.

## UNCORRECTED PROOF ISSUE

**Mr DEAN** - Minister, a lot of people who have their names down for housing come into my office. I have every low socioeconomic group in the north of the State in my electorate so I get bombarded with these requests. They drive passed a home, they see it vacant for a long period of time. What is the turnaround? Do you have a policy on a turnaround period for a house that is left vacant?

**Ms THORP** - It is 28 days, and we are within that.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - It is 14 days from tenancy and 14 days in maintenance. By the time you do an inspection after somebody leaves, the keys are handed in, it is scoped up what work needs to be done. It then goes over to maintenance and it is 14 days there; it comes back to tenancy and a condition of property is done again, the lease is drawn, an offer is made. So it is 28 days and we have been within that benchmark performance the whole time I have been director. The average turnaround time in April was 20.5 days.

**Mr DEAN** - The maintenance budget and the ability to get the maintenance done, that is available, is it?

**Ms THORP** - Housing Tasmania has an annual budget of around \$32 million that is spent on ongoing maintenance. One of the things that has been marvellous is the economic stimulus package, which is about \$9.4 million. I love talking about this because it is a bit of an artificial construct. There is argument about what the figure really is - some people say it is about \$90 million. How this is worked out is the whole value of the stock portfolio is looked at and said, 'It is worth x amount of money'. If over the life of any building you are going to replace the bathroom every so many years, the roof every so many years, and you did that as a formula, you would say that on the stock configuration of \$1.8 billion - a house's lifecycle. This is where this almost artificial sum of \$90 million comes from, it is so-called backlog. If you are able to magically go out there and replace every tap that was at that time line, every kitchen that was at that particular age, based on that formula, you would need to spend that amount of money. The \$32 million this year that is being spent on maintenance goes on regular upgrade maintenance and re-tenancy maintenance - the state that houses are sometimes left it, and you really do not know until you walk in the door what they are going to be like.

We also have some special projects going, which I know will be dear to your heart, that are aimed at energy saving. We have a booklet that is passed out to Housing Tasmania tenants to help them manage their power costs and the warmth and amenity of their homes. This is what I mean by the kind of work that Housing Tasmania does in supporting tenants in public housing.

**Mr DEAN** - How much outstanding debt is there owed to Housing Tasmania from clients who have failed to honour their agreements and moved out?

**Ms THORP** - Current arrears average less than 1 per cent of collectables, which is better than the national benchmark of 2 per cent. Total debts owed to Housing Tasmania on current tenancies as at 30 April this year were: in the south, \$358 350; in the north, \$169 793; in the north-west, \$133 881; coming to a total of \$662 024. All debts are vigorously pursued, including the use of collection agencies where appropriate. In cases where it is uneconomic to pursue debts further they are recommended for write-off. For the financial year 2007-08 bad debts totalling \$948 345 were written off, and bad debts recommended for write-off in the current financial year is expected to be a similar level. I will take you back to that previous comment where current arrears average less than 1 per cent of collectables.

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**Mr DEAN** - So in that year there was almost \$1 million written off in debt?

**Ms THORP** - Yes. This is a real problem. People are supposed to clear their debts before they can get into housing, which is often problematic. If you have someone who has a complex life situation and has accumulated debt to Housing Tasmania - one thing we really want to pursue, and I think the Commonwealth is clean on this, is direct debt, which I think will go a long way if we can get some national agreement on it to have people's rent taken from their Centrelink payments. Then this problem will not occur.

**Mr DEAN** - So with \$1 million written off in debt, and the debt you just referred to -

**Ms THORP** - I would prefer you to say \$900 000 - it sounds so much better!

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - Can I just clarify it. That is when someone vacates, there is often damage to the property and it is then a question of how you follow up on those tenants. We try to pursue them and should try to get it back - we use debt-collection agencies - but at the end of the day, if someone has gone AWOL and we cannot find them, it is at that point that we -

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, I understand the system. Your position, and proper too in my view, is that if they have an outstanding debt to Housing Tasmania, they are not entitled to another Housing Tasmania home until that debt is paid off.

**Ms THORP** - No. A position can be negotiated. If someone has themselves on a repayment plan, even if it is as small as \$10 a week, and they are showing that they are paying that off and are demonstrating the willingness to do that, then having a debt does not preclude them from getting another property. You have to be human in these situations.

**Mr DEAN** - Sure. The position I was going to put then is not accurate. We have those on the list - on the three categories; if on the third category it will be a long time before they will get a home - but in addition to that we would also have those who are unable to come up with a plan for the repayment of debts and therefore they still aren't -

**Ms THORP** - They could still show up on the waiting list though.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - They may well be in that 'being processed' group, the 200 that we talked about. They will not become active until they have demonstrated a debt-repayment history or they agree to some arrangement with us. They are either being housed somewhere else in the private rental market, or with friends or family, something like that. If they are on the list they have either agreed to undertake a repayment schedule and demonstrated goodwill and commitment to doing so or they are still sitting there in that 'being processed' group awaiting such time that they are willing to commit.

**Mr ROBERTS** - I just sat here quietly in the corner, as I have been, and as the person who signs off the bad debts, I ask my colleagues a few questions about, is it really \$948 000? I do not remember signing off that much.

*Laughter.*

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**Mr ROBERTS** - I think we should take it on notice, we would like to check that number, we think that number includes a couple of things, not just bad-debt write-off. I certainly do not recall seeing - even though I know it would come through in a small amount each time - that volume of write-off and I would like to check that. I want the committee to know that we are not completely confident of that number at the moment.

**CHAIR** - That is before we put out our media release.

*Laughter.*

**Mr ROBERTS** - Please give us 24 hours to check on the numbers.

**Mr DEAN** - I did have a lot of questions but I think it is better if I leave a little time -

**Ms THORP** - I am more than happy to take questions on notice, if you would like to give them to me.

**CHAIR** - I think seeing that you have done so well, we will allow you one more.

**Mr DEAN** - I want to raise the issue of Housing Tasmania policy. I raised this with you before, Minister, but I want to raise it again. Your policy in relation to people who have Housing Tasmania properties who are in prison and in prison, as I understand the policy, for a period of three months and/or more, unless there are special circumstances - I think there can be some extension of that period - of them losing their Housing Tasmania home, even though they are still paying their rent, even though they still maintaining that property. Why do we have a black and white situation there, why is it not dealt with on merit?

There is a particular case - and the people here will know who I am talking about, I will not identify the name - of a young lady who is currently in prison, with three young children. Her mother currently looks after the children, and I am advised that she is suffering immensely because she now has no Housing Tasmania home to go back into. She will have to go on the waiting list to come back into a suitable home and it is doing nothing to rehabilitate this girl. I am told she is turning around.

**Ms THORP** - Yes, that is a difficult one. You would appreciate with the need and the waiting list that we have that we cannot afford to let houses remain vacant with no-one living in them for month after month. So that is an issue itself.

Specifically about their going to prison - when someone is incarcerated they do not pay full rent, they pay \$5 a week to hold the property. What I think is coming into place -

**Mr DEAN** - Sorry, on this one. The mother of the girl was quite prepared to pay full rent for the whole time she was in jail.

**Ms BRESNEHAN** - We have an issue though of vacant properties and that is why we have a benchmark of only three months. We understand that people are going to prison for a long time and if it is for a short period of time we do not want to destabilise them - exactly as you say, going to jail for two or three months and come back and find themselves homeless. So we accept three months as a benchmark and set peppercorn rent while they are in jail for that time.

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As you identified, depending on the circumstance - if it was four months and someone was coming out - we would negotiate an extra month. But if it was 12 months, then there is a real issue for us about having a property vacant for 12 months, unattended, not bringing rent, being open to vandalism, et cetera. So we have benchmarks but we negotiate, depending on the term of the sentence and the condition of the -

**Mr DEAN** - I think it is nine months, with remissions, but I stand to be corrected on that.

**CHAIR** - We might follow that one up in the House at a later time.

**Mr WING** - Was the grandmother living in the house?

[5.30 p.m.]

**Mr DEAN** - No, the grandmother has her own house, she has bought a Housing Tasmania home.

### **Grants and subsidies**

**CHAIR** - If there are no other questions - and obviously there are hundreds of questions, Minister, and we appreciate that it could take all day - we will move to Grants and Subsidies. I am interested in this area to know what the total number of payments were made for children abused in care, as that is part of grants and subsidies. What is the total amount paid out?

**Ms THORP** - We have that information, we are just trying to locate it.

**CHAIR** - Minister, the member for Rosevears has a general question whilst you are finding the information.

**Ms THORP** - I have it now. The total quantum of payments to 26 May 2009, which must have been when they did the stats for this purpose, equate to around \$7.4 million.

**CHAIR** - And the number of people who received it?

**Ms JACOB** - At that date, interviews of applicants eligible under the scheme, 257 cases have been finalised and 221 claimants have accepted the offer of an ex gratia payment and that is how many would have actually received the payment.

**CHAIR** - Do you have a list of how many missed out?

**Ms THORP** - Who were unsuccessful?

**CHAIR** - Yes, unsuccessful applicants.

**Ms THORP** - We do, but I do not think it is in this particular paper - hang on, 123 claims were not eligible under this scheme - so far, because they are still being assessed obviously, so some people were successful and some were not.

**Mr FINCH** - In the present economic climate of funding and job cuts, there is of course intense interest in salaries of those who are retaining their jobs, as we saw on Monday with the Minister for Education and Skills. So I think it is appropriate to ask what the Secretary of the

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department is earning and his four deputies. If the information is already out there, that is quite okay -

**Ms THORP** - It is on the public record but we are happy to table that information.

**Mr FINCH** - If you wouldn't mind.

**Ms THORP** - Yes, we will table that information.

**Mr FINCH** - It would appear that Mr Roberts and his deputy secretary took considerable pay cuts to come to Tasmania. What do you think the attraction was in Tasmania? If you know, perhaps we can attract more highly-professional people to Tasmania on half their previous incomes.

*Laughter.*

**Mr FINCH** - This could open up numerous possibilities.

**Ms THORP** - I know Mr Roberts used to be quite a pasty-faced man.

*Laughter.*

**Ms THORP** - Now he has become outdoorsy and sporty. We all know, as Tasmanians, what an attractive place Tasmania is to live in and I am sure they were the very qualities, plus the challenges of the job, that attracted Mr Roberts here. I should interview him on this, shouldn't I?

**CHAIR** - He might like to add something himself.

**Mr ROBERTS** - I would like to add something. Money does not motivate everybody all the time, so I think that is important; the ability to influence an important agenda is another one. I think it is an interesting point and the Department of Economic Development have actually asked me if I would be prepared to feature in one of their magazines as somebody who has left the UK and what reasons I left the UK and what I have experienced and what I have seen and I have agreed that I will do that and I think that is a worthy thing to do.

**CHAIR** - I heard that it was because there was no sunshine.

**Mr ROBERTS** - That does not have its interests but we have not had a lot of that, have we.

*Laughter.*

**Mr WING** - You may like to express some views to some senior members in the Justice department.

*Laughter.*

**Mr ROBERTS** - I thank you for the opportunity and I hope I am doing the job justice.

**CHAIR** - You got some high accolades earlier on in the day, as you will recall, if you want a bit of feedback about it. Mr Finch is that the end of your line of questioning. We will move on to the capital investment program.

### **Capital Investment Program**

**CHAIR** - We have probably covered, Minister, some of this area that we are going through today. It has obviously been reduced significantly.

**Ms THORP** - We are actually doing quite well. If you look at the new projects under the capital investment program the estimated total cost, for example, of the supported accommodation of \$2 630 million and then we have an amount of \$1 400 million to be expended in 2009-10 the rest of that \$2 630 million has already been spent.

**CHAIR** - Are we on the same page? The figure that is in table 5.2 says \$1 903 000 so it is probably perhaps a tad confusing.

**Ms EGAN** - We are at 10 and 5.11 - capital funding.

**Ms THORP** - That is pretty good news actually. There is new projects and continuing projects and there are significant sums of money, a total in 2009-10 is -

**CHAIR** - But most of it is Nation Building money.

**Ms THORP** - A lot of it is, that is true but that is good. The housing new projects includes the indigenous money, the YPIRAC money and, as we have discussed, what is going on with the economic stimulus package stuff. Where you see that figure up the top of disability services, supported accommodation and there is a figure of \$2 630 000 as a total and then \$1 400 000 as the expenditure for 2009-10 that represents the balance of the \$2 630 000 because some of it has already been spent and the same goes for the stage 1 of the stimulus package, too, does it not?

**CHAIR** - There are no forward Estimates in Disability Services; you are not anticipating any new accommodation?

**Ms THORP** - These are specific lump sums of money to be spent in a specific time.

**Ms JACOB** - We would be expecting out of the stimulus package that there will be considerable investment in disability accommodation.

**CHAIR** - Minister, we will just head to output group 4, which is the independent children's review services and the Office of the Commissioner for Children.

### **Output group 4 Independent Children's Review Services**

#### **4.1 Office of the Commissioner for Children**

**CHAIR** - There is virtually no information in the budget papers in relation to the funding activities of the Commissioner for Children so I would like some information.

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**Ms THORP** - The money is provided directly to fund the Office of the Commissioner for Children. In 2008-09, it was \$616 000 and in 2009-10 the budget will be \$647 000 -

**CHAIR** - An increase of 7.2 per cent - \$44 000.

**Ms THORP** - There is a lot of work going on in the office and some specific projects but the Commissioner for Children reports in the form of an annual report to Parliament, not to me, and he is independent so he is not accountable for this. We have given him the dollars and basically he works it out himself and reports back to Parliament through an annual report.

**CHAIR** - Is the increase a salary increase?

**Ms THORP** - It would be for a variety of things, I would imagine. It would be indexation.

**CHAIR** - Is there any government budget management strategy component

**Ms THORP** - In his office of managing, as far as I know no. We do not have a cost -

**Ms JACOB** - I had not thought of that.

**Ms THORP** - That is a good idea, we might add that in next year.

**Ms JACOB** - His office is such a small office that we would obviously try to protect it from any cuts but he may need to take some efficiency but we have not got that.

**CHAIR** - Where is it housed?

**Ms JACOB** - It is in the stone building next to the ABC building at the railway roundabout.

**CHAIR** - How many staff?

**Ms JACOB** - He has six staff, from memory. I stand to be corrected on that.

**Ms THORP** - We can get you copies of his annual report if that would be useful. What I am saying is even though we pay him, he does not actually report to us financially, he reports to Parliament in the form of an annual report.

**CHAIR** - It was interesting that it was one of the line items that had no note to it - especially when it was an increase.

**Ms JACOB** - We basically are the holder of the money but the Commissioner for Children is an independent statutory office and it is not responsible to us as an agency.

**Ms THORP** - Like the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General.

**Ms JACOB** - That is where the budget is accounted for but we do not have accountability and he is not accountable to us so in normal Estimates terms we would not expect to have questions about the business because that is independent from us.

**CHAIR** - This actually came to the department late in allocating of the budget.



**Ms THORP** - I saw Colin Huntly and he had initially thought it was in Minister Giddings' area and asked me the question and I said it was us.

**CHAIR** - I take it then in the terms of the Premier yesterday your department is really the post box, so to speak?

**Ms JACOB** - I would emphasise the fact that the commissioner operates entirely independently and does his own accounting to Parliament, independent of the agencies.

**Mr FINCH** - Does he work to a piece of legislation, Minister? Is the legislation connected from the office?

**Ms JACOB** - The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act has a specific section that relates to the Office of the Commissioner for Children and what his functions are and what his rights are.

**Mr FINCH** - Is there any thought of reviewing that or looking at that or is he looking for an upgrade of that legislation?

**Ms THORP** - He has not mentioned it in conversation with me but we are reviewing it.

**Ms JACOB** - The commissioner I think would say that the current legislation provides him with sufficient flexibility and breadth to do the work. He certainly has not raised any issues about any restrictions caused by legislative clauses so I would not imagine there is any need for that to be reviewed but if there was there will be an opportunity in the second round of the amendments to the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act that they could be canvassed and the commissioner is in fact a member of the steering committee for the review of that legislation so presumably if he has any issues he will put them on the table.

**Mr FINCH** - I am just really curious about whether, Minister, you have conversations with the Commissioner for Children?

**Ms THORP** - Yes, on a regular basis. He has been doing some really interesting things. He did an extensive report that was commissioned by Minister Giddings in relation to the use of respite services, people with disabilities. I recently launched a charter of rights for children in out-of-home care and he had taken a lead role in the development of that. He recently brought the winner of a competition that he had run - because he has a Youth Advisory Council - amongst young people who were connected to his office and the prize was shadowing the Commissioner for Children for a day and part of that was to come to a meeting with me to talk about issues that that young person was involved in.

**Mr FINCH** - We have had the Commissioner for Children, I am sure, at budget Estimates.

**Mr WING** - Not the present one.

**Mr FINCH** - It is Mr Mason?

**Ms THORP** - Yes. He has briefed you.

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**Mr FINCH** - It was really interesting to hear what concerns him, what the issues are and what is going on with children. I just make the suggestion that probably next year if he was available to talk to us -

**Ms THORP** - I wonder whether budget Estimates is the appropriate place, given his independence from me but I think you are right -

**Mr FINCH** - Maybe a briefing?

**Ms THORP** - I am very happy to organise that but once again I cannot direct him. We would need to get request, probably through the Leader's office, directly to the commissioner asking him to come in and we could facilitate that.

**CHAIR** - I do have some additional questions and I appreciate that he is not here to answer them so if we can facilitate another time where we can actually speak with the commissioner that would be -

**Ms THORP** - I am sure he would be delighted.

**Ms JACOB** - I am sure he would be very happy to provide a briefing.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Part of his role is to actually scrutinise some of the work that you do through his organisation so -

**Ms THORP** - That is right and he is often quite critical.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - he stands alone over here so that he can actually have the power to scrutinise the work that is going on here and an effective manner so it would be inappropriate.

**CHAIR** - We appreciate that but it is just that it was given to this committee for scrutiny as an output line item.

**Ms THORP** - I think the expression that you used about a post box is probably pretty accurate and the quality of the relationship between the Commissioner for Children and the relevant ministers is really quite a personal one.

**CHAIR** - We understand that. I think given the time and I believe that we have pretty much exhausted where this committee wanted to provide scrutiny today but I would just like to sincerely firstly thank you but also congratulate you on the way in which you have conducted yourself today and your team.

**Ms THORP** - Thank you.

**CHAIR** - This is day three for us and I do not think I hesitate at all on behalf of our committee in saying that you did a fantastic job and you were so well supported by your team.

**Ms THORP** - I would like to thank the committee for their courtesy and the questioning. I found it very useful myself to see where you are all going with your questioning. It is good for me to do that and thanks for the compliments about the way we prepared for it and I really do

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need to pass sincere thank you to everyone here present. People have been working very hard for quite some time.

**CHAIR** - We understand and we also appreciate that it is a great opportunity to get out some information, media and releases and the like, and I have not in my short time but it has certainly been really useful and, as I said, I do congratulate you on the way that your department has presented to the committee, and I am sure that Mr Wing would like to say something.

**Mr WING** - Yes. I think you have all done very well both the front bench and back bench.

*Laughter.*

**CHAIR** - Thank you. You are the only department who has presented lollies and sweets on the table so we thought that was fantastic. Well done. Thank you and all the best.

**The committee adjourned at 5.50 p.m.**