

## **THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

### **RECORDED PROCEEDINGS: TUESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2024**

#### **Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Good morning everyone, and welcome to this third day of the public hearings of the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. My name is Natasha Stott Despoja, I'm the Royal Commissioner for this Inquiry. And I begin by acknowledging the land on which we gather today, the land of the Kaurna people, and I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and any Elders from other communities who may be present or listening today. I do want to thank Mr Robert Taylor for his initial and generous welcome to country when the Royal Commission hearings first began. As you may be aware, the Commission has been in place since July 1 and we endeavoured to engage as many stakeholders as possible. We've had in excess of 80 meetings, received around 800 responses to our survey tool Shared With Us and received more than 500 submissions. All of these things have helped us hone in on areas and topics and themes that require greater examination or investigation. So we're now in a stage of public hearings. Our first session, as you may recall, examined the issue of housing and homelessness for survivors and victims, the access to finance and emergency accommodation for victims of violence, and our second hearing examined issues such as access to forensic medical examinations and how difficult they are to access, particularly in remote, regional and rural areas. Today it's a shift in focus. We're going to examine some of the ways that we can prevent domestic, family and sexual violence from occurring in the first place, namely education strategies in schools, in particular, the concept of primary prevention. After the first set of witnesses, we anticipate we'll take a break around 11.15 or maybe 11.30, depending on how intense our discussions are. I would like to now invite our Counsel Assisting, Ms Orr, to provide an overview and introduction. Thank you.

#### **Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you Commissioner. Today and tomorrow we are conducting the Royal Commission's third and fourth days of public hearings. Again, they will be focused on two different topics. Today, primary prevention in schools, as the Commissioner has just indicated, and tomorrow we are looking at effective interventions for people who use violence. Before we commence, I will address a few things that were addressed at the commencement of our November public hearings. First, I acknowledge the domestic, family or sexual violence lived experience of anyone involved in the hearings, following on the live stream or watching the recording of this hearing at a later time. Today, in the context of learning about education of school aged children, I acknowledge particularly the lived experience of children or young people who are experiencing, who have experienced or have otherwise been exposed to domestic, family or sexual violence. If anyone wishes to seek support or advice, a list of support services can be found on the Royal Commission website

[www.royalcommissiondfsv.sa.gov.au](http://www.royalcommissiondfsv.sa.gov.au). In relation to terminology, when we refer to domestic and family violence, it includes all forms of violence that can occur within relationships. This includes intimate partner violence, violence perpetrated between family members and in family-like settings, coercive and controlling behaviour and sexual violence. Sexual violence, whether in a domestic or family setting or otherwise, includes any sexual activity without a person's consent. We will continue to use the term victim-survivor to refer to people, including children, who have experienced or who are currently experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence. And we will use the term person who uses violence when referring to an individual who uses domestic, family or sexual violence to cause harm to another. Today's hearing, as I said, is about primary prevention in schools. Schools, and the education system more broadly, have an important role to play in helping to prevent domestic family and sexual violence by delivering appropriate and effective education to South Australia's young people. In South Australia, this is done by delivering various programs and curricula across the topics of child protection, respectful relationships, consent, sexuality and sexual health. There are different approaches to the topics covered, to delivery and to terminology used across the different education systems in South Australia. For this hearing and for the Royal Commission more broadly, we will use the description Relationships and Sexuality Education. We intend this to cover the broad range of teaching programs and curricula directed at teaching these topics I've just outlined, in age-appropriate ways. The Commission has learned that the purpose of this education is to assist children and young people to live safe, productive and fulfilling lives. It can be a protective factor through developing awareness of the facts, skills and attitudes which allow for healthy sexual development and the creation of respectful and safe relationships. In this way, the provision of this education is a key part of primary prevention in South Australia. This is acknowledged in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032, which notes that making sure that all children in Australia can access age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education and supporting recovery from childhood trauma are important strategies for ending gender-based violence. Of course, education systems include early education, long day care, early learning centres and kindergartens, skills training centres such as TAFE and registered training organisations, and universities. The focus of today's hearing is on education in schools, but the Commission understands that primary prevention is important across all areas of education. In addition, there are children who may not attend formal schooling or may not attend regularly. Some children are homeschooled. Some children are disengaged from school or face barriers to attending school on a regular basis. The Commission acknowledges that for some children and young people, relationship and sexuality education may be more effectively provided outside of a formal school environment. There are also examples of primary prevention work happening within communities and through various non-government organisations. We've heard about primary prevention programs being operated by the Australian Refugee Association, the Legal Services Commission, RASA and others. I mention these things to illustrate that schools and other formal education settings are one very important way of providing primary prevention education, but they are not, and cannot be, the only way that it is provided to people in South Australia. Again, the Commission is considering these things, although they will not be the focus of today's hearing. The school system in South Australia consists of three schooling sectors, public, Catholic and independent. Public and Catholic schools run under an education system through the Department for Education for public schools and Catholic Education South Australia for Catholic schools. In contrast, independent schools operate as independent organisations. The Commission understands that the Australian Curriculum, Version 9, is taught in South Australian schools. This includes content related to respectful relationships, consent and

sexual health. The Commission further understands that schools implement their own curricula or additional programs that are suitable for their context. These can, and do, include subjects relevant to relationships and sexuality education. There are differences across and within all three education sectors in how relationships and sexuality education is delivered, including who's teaching it and whether parents can opt out of their child receiving certain elements of it. So there is not one system or approach in delivering this education in South Australia. This is no different to any other state across Australia. In its work so far, the Royal Commission has received many submissions and attended listening sessions which have referred to the value of relationships and sexuality education as a prevention tool and the need for evidence-based and comprehensive relationships and sexuality education in schools. We've heard that this education can assist young people to understand that things going on for them might not be appropriate or safe. We've heard about the importance of meeting students where they are rather than delivering a learning program without reference to their context. We've heard from organisations and agencies delivering this education, most of whom see a window for and a benefit to expanding the education they are currently delivering. We've heard from young people that they believe the education could be improved. They've referenced the content, who's delivering it and how it's delivered. On the 1st of November this year, the Royal Commission held a student summit coordinated with the assistance of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and a consultancy called Think Human. 89 high school students from 15 schools across the public, independent and Catholic sectors in South Australia attended. When discussing respectful relationships education, the students explained to the Commission that - it varied a lot from school to school, there is sometimes an issue with teachers who themselves were taught different things than they are being asked to teach on the topic now and teachers who have different viewpoints themselves on the topic, and they said they felt there needed to be a standard approach across all schools so people can receive the help they need. Against that background I turn now to the witnesses who will give evidence today. The first session will be a panel discussion with witnesses from each of the three education sectors in South Australia: the Department for Education, Catholic Education SA and the Association of Independent Schools, SA. These witnesses will assist us to understand the different schooling sectors and systems in South Australia and the different ways in which they approach the delivery of primary prevention education in their schools. We will then hear from Dr Tessa Opie. Dr Opie is a relationships and sexuality education teacher, advocate, and consultant. She has, among other things, assisted schools and organisations to review and develop curricula and resources. As part of her work in this area, she's had significant interactions with children and young people in relation to what they have told her they want to learn and how. Dr Opie will explain what is important in providing this education to children and young people, what children and young people are saying they want to learn and what is needed to keep them safe. Then this afternoon we will hear from witnesses who are delivering programs involving this type of education to children and young people in South Australia. First, Ms Sara Porzio, who is the Principal of the Fregon Area School. Fregon is in the remote north of South Australia in the APY lands. Ms Porzio will appear by video link along with members of the Kungka Ninti program team to speak about the way in which the school worked with members of their community to develop a curriculum to suit their community's unique context. It is likely that the way in which this evidence is presented will be slightly different from that which is traditional for a Royal Commission. As I said, Ms Porzio will be accompanied by members of the Kungka Ninti team. We anticipate that she will consult with and may be assisted by them when she gives evidence. Some of the team speak English, others prefer to speak in their own language. We have been advised that the team did not want an interpreter for this session.

This Royal Commission is ensuring that we hear from voices that are often not heard, and so we invited this team to tell us how they wanted to give evidence at this hearing. In order to hear from people like these leaders and educators in a remote Aboriginal community, we are happy to depart from what might be a traditional way to receive evidence. After that we will hear from Mr Jake Battifouco, General Manager of Power Community. Power Community is a separate not-for-profit charity arm of the Port Adelaide Football Club. He will give evidence about the education programs that Power Community runs, primarily within schools, and how role models like sportspeople can be used to educate children and young people. Finally for today, Ms Holly Skene will give evidence. Ms Skene is the Chief Executive Officer of SHINE SA. SHINE has developed a program for teaching relationships and sexuality education in schools. They have a memorandum of understanding with the South Australian Education Department and their program is delivered in a large percentage of public secondary schools. Ms Skene will tell the Commission about this program and explain, from the perspective of an organisation who has developed this program and trains teachers to deliver it, what is important in relation to training teachers to deliver the education, what is important in delivering the education more broadly and where any gaps might be.

Thank you Commissioner.

I now call Ms Tracey Davies, Dr Jill Gowdie and Ms Michele Oliphant.

### **Panel discussion:**

**Tracey Davies, Department for Education, South Australia**

**Dr Jill Gowdie, Catholic Education, South Australia**

**Michele Oliphant, Association of Independent Schools, South Australia**

### **Kerryn Hawkes:**

Do you truly and solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Say, I do truly and solemnly affirm.

### **Tracey Davies:**

I do truly and solemnly affirm.

### **Kerryn Hawkes;**

Thank you, and please state your full name.

### **Tracey Davies:**

Tracey Michelle Davies.

### **Kerryn Hawkes:**

Do you swear that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Say, I swear.

### **Dr Jill Gowdie:**

I swear.

### **Kerryn Hawkes:**

And please state your full name.

### **Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Dr Jill Maree Gowdie.

### **Kerryn Hawkes:**

Thank you. Do you swear that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Say I swear.

### **Michele Oliphant:**

I swear.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

And please state your full name.

**Michele Oliphant:**

Michele Oliphant.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you everyone. I want to start your evidence by some introductions, if I may. So Ms Davies, you work for the Department for Education. Could you just tell us in very broad terms what the Department does, or what the Department's responsible for?

**Tracey Davies:**

The whole department? Yeah, look, the whole department is a very big organisation and ultimately we have responsibility and feel quite privileged to provide learning and caring opportunities for our students in public education settings, whether that be long day care, child care centres and our primary schools, area schools and secondary schools.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And I understand that it's an education system and by that I mean it governs the education department schools.

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then so those schools that you've just mentioned need to follow directions, policies.

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, we'll have an Education Act, Children's Education Act, and it's governed in very different ways. There are people who work within a corporate organisation, so in 31 Flinders Street, and then we have multiple systems and structures set up across the whole of South Australia, including our most remote areas and our metropolitan areas. So it's a, yeah, I think it's a 26,000 employee organisation that at times is quite complex and understanding where everyone fits is something that we try and do daily and constantly.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And in that, what's your role?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, my role, I work in a division that is called Curriculum and Learning and we have six different directorates. Curriculum Development, Aboriginal Education, Curriculum programs, Curriculum Policy and Standards, Literacy and Numeracy programs. I'm the Director of Curriculum programs and we offer 17 programs that are often statewide, cross sector, if you think about sport and water safety and aquatics. We have STEM learning, we have the Premier's Challenges, we have instrumental music, the Music Education Strategy, Humanities, Dream Big, the Arts and also the Child Protection Curriculum is delivered and operated through our Directorate.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you, I will ask you more about that in a moment. But just for now, Dr Gowdie you're here from Catholic Education.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yes

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can you just tell us, given overview, what is Catholic Education SA?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

So these are, we oversee schools within a Catholic context and so the organisation of that is a little different to public schools and so the overall governance is SACCS, South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools and the Archbishop of Adelaide and the Bishop of Port Pirie also sit on that. And for this area that we're talking about today, they have

particular oversight of those curricula. They need to sign off those curricula and all Catholic schools across South Australia, whether they are in the Catholic system or whether they are separately governed, or 'order owned' might be a term that people would be more familiar with, they still have to teach these particular curricula. So yes, we've got about, just to give you a big broad picture, we've got about 101 schools, although a number of those schools have multiple large campuses rather than small schools. So there are two entities, I guess, underneath that. There is the Archdiocese of Adelaide schools and there are the schools in Port Pirie. There are 14 schools in Port Pirie and they're generally the regional and remote schools and the rest are within the very large Adelaide Archdiocese. I'm one of the directors of Catholic Education so Catholic Education South Australia is the office which services schools, Catholic schools right across South Australia, and reports to the Commission for Catholic schools. So the Commission sets policy, resourcing and direction, and I guess Catholic Education South Australia, the office, carries that out and supports all of our schools. I'm one of the directors, and the area that we're talking about today falls under my area of responsibility.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And just to clarify, it's primary and secondary schools.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Reception to year 12, and we have one other college, Compass College, which we will be developing other expressions of that community, and that's for 17 to 24 year olds, and many of them, those young people have, for one reason or another, not been able to pursue really what they're meant to do in life, and so they're invited into that community. It has a creche, so a big part of that is learning about respectful relationships for themselves.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. Ms Oliphant, you're here from the Association for Independent Schools in South Australia. Could you explain what's known as AISSA, as I understand?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Yes, so again, it's a little bit different from your two systems. So AISSA represents 100 % of the independent, so non-Catholic and non-government schools in South Australia. And the AISSA is the peak body for the independent school sector in South Australia. And it leads, supports, represents, and advocates for 105 very diverse schools. So the AISSA it's different in that it's a member organisation, not a system, so hence each member school is separately governed, they have their own boards, policies, procedures according to their philosophies, values, their specialty areas. However, each school is subject to the same legislative and registration requirements of all schools in South Australia, they all implement the legislated approach to the Australian curriculum using a wide variety of evidence-based educational and philosophical approaches to suit their cohorts and their context, which include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools, Lutheran, Steiner, Islamic, Christian, Uniting Church, non-denominational, Montessori, sports, university, flexible, special assistance and specialist schools. And that's not all of them, so it's a very diverse group.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you said you're an organisation, not an authority?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Correct.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So is it correct then that means there's no governance as such by AISSA over the schools?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Yes, so each school will have their independence, so essentially we're the peak body, so whilst we may lead and support and represent and advocate, we do not govern.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And consistent with that, I understand you don't collect data, that much data.

**Michele Oliphant:**

Not in the same way that these sectors will collect data, so we will offer particular events and particular professional learnings and things where we will collect data on the things that the AISSA oversee, but we won't do the kinds of data collection.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then what's your role?

**Michele Oliphant:**

So, my role is quite new. I think I came on board on November the 20th. So, the AISSA in collaboration with the Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, have engaged my role, which is an education consultant, to support schools with the development and implementation of consent and respectful relationships education curriculum and programs in independent schools across both South Australia and the Northern Territory and this role comes as part of the funded reform initiative recently introduced by the Federal Government.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. Okay, so I want to now move to curricula in the schools and just by way of overview or generally speaking to establish some sort of general matters around the curricula being delivered in South Australia. So is it correct that in Australia we have a national Australian curriculum that all schools must follow? Everyone is nodding? That's good. And it is divided into different broad learning areas if I can describe them like that. The Australian curriculum goes from reception to year 10?

**Panel:**

Yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then is it correct that for year 11 and 12 SACE or other certificates of education take over if you like? Yes? And then in addition to that National Australian Curriculum, schools can and do implement their own curricular or additional programs that are suitable for their context. So we're all here today in relation to education aimed at primary prevention of domestic family and sexual violence in schools. So that's what I want to ask about now. This primary prevention education, as I understand it, is given various different names across different sectors. Some that we've heard is respectful relationships education, consent education, sexuality or sexual health education. They might mean slightly different things and they're used in different contexts, is that correct? Yes? So, are there, perhaps starting with you Ms Davies, are there any terms that the education department uses, or what terms are you using to describe this type of education?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yes, so we have a safeguarding children and young people policy and by delivering the keeping safe child protection curriculum for children and young people from age 3 to year 12 that's how we meet those requirements and it's a respectful relationship and child safety curriculum that teaches all children and young people to have the right to be safe they can help themselves to be safe by talking to people they trust and it's mandated in all South Australian Department schools.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I will ask you more about the curriculum in a moment, I was just concentrating on the terminology.

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, so consent is defined in the Australian Curriculum as informed and freely given agreement to engage in an activity or permission for a specific thing to happen. This could include agreement on what personal data can be shared online for example. Coercion is

also defined in the Australian Curriculum as the act of persuading and compelling someone to do something through the use of threats or force. Gender stereotypes as defined in the Australian Curriculum as the beliefs that people have about the characteristics of males and females. Stereotypes can vary between cultures and over time gender stereotyping can be harmful to people of all genders. Respectful relations as it's defined in the Australian Curriculum is the connections characterised by non-violence, equality, mutual respect and consideration and trust. Sexual health education which is addressed in the Australian Curriculum health and PE learning area at an age and developmentally appropriate level, aims to improve their ability to develop healthy relationships, be confident and happy within themselves and their bodies and make well informed and safe decisions in the future.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So these terms are all defined within the curricula?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, and sexual health is defined in the Australian Curriculum as a positive and respectful approach to sexuality, sexual relationships, which may include engaging in pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. And then protective behaviours is defined in the Australian Curriculum as behaviours which enable children to recognise and respond to situations in which their personal space and sense of safety will be compromised.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. Dr Gowdie, can I ask you, is there like an umbrella term that Catholic education use for this type of education?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Well, first of all, we teach the Australian curriculum so all of those definitions stand. And secondly, so I think that what you've been pointing to is what we call the sexuality and respectful relationships curriculum. The name of it is called Made in the Image of God and it tells you what it is on the tin. So basically I think that if we were looking at the difference or what's different about how we teach, I think it's probably about the framing of it, so it's about learning about, knowledge is very important, so all of those things are learning about yourself, and then it's also deeply embedding a sense of dignity, so that every young person knows that every young person matters and matters absolutely, so that's probably a big message, so it's to penetrate the dentine layer, if you like, and to help them have a deep down belief that they matter, and they matter absolutely, and that innate dignity that they have is inalienable. So if they believe that, then the knowledge that they have about consent and respectful relationships is a lot easier to implement.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. Ms Oliphant, just sticking with terminology for now if we can, is there one particular umbrella term or type of education that's being delivered across independent schools or does it vary?

**Michele Oliphant:**

So, I'll probably repeat myself a few times in the sense of because we're not a system, we don't collect that kind of specific level data and I suspect the programs and terminology used is likely to vary from school to school, however, exactly the same, all our schools implement the Australian curriculum so they will be using that same standard sort of terminology that's in the curriculum as well. I do think, you know, looking at the websites of our schools in preparing for this, I could see that there are programs highlighted on the websites that really do include some of the very specific consent and respect for relationship education programs such as Keeping Safe or SHINE or In Your Skin and many other programs, I also think similar to what you were talking about, because our schools, there are a lot of specialty schools that deal with particular contexts and cohorts and they're

very skilled at adapting to ensure that the level of engagement and understanding and the way things are delivered is going to be suitable for their cohorts, that that is going to be occurring. And I guess the thing I would say is, with the bringing in of the role that I am sitting in, we are going to be inviting our schools in the future, in fact, very shortly, to share with us this kind of information so future focus we are likely to have a lot more information around the exact terminology.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. So keeping in mind all of this variation or the large variety of terminology and education being offered, for present purposes, as I said in my opening, I'm going to use the expression relationships and sexuality education but we mean that as an umbrella term to capture everything. And you've all mentioned the Australian curriculum now, so I just want to ask a little bit about in the context of relationships and sexuality education, how the Australian curriculum fits in, I guess. Perhaps, starting with you, Ms Davies, can you explain how relationships and sexuality education is being delivered under the Australian curriculum, generally speaking?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yes, sure. And good morning, Commissioner. Sorry, I didn't say good morning. In our public education system because we have an opportunity where in the health and physical activity learning area there are age appropriate developmentally pieces of curricula that can be delivered via a health lesson and also we have mapped our child protection curriculum to the health and physical activity learning area as well. And so understanding that schools can't do everything and are very busy places and the curriculum is fairly crowded, it allows for respectful relationships to be taught as part of a health lesson and therefore you don't have to repeat it if you are delivering the mandated child protection curriculum. So it's that just-in-time teaching, it's relevance, where it fits for that group of young people. And it also, we think it provides an opportunity so no child or young person misses out on what they're entitled to, and that is age-appropriate, developmentally, evidence-based, respectful relationships and or sexual health education.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So you've mentioned there the health and PE curriculum, so is it right that under the Australian curriculum these topics are taught under the health and PE stream?

**Tracey Davies:**

Mm-hmm, yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can you give us some examples of the types of topic areas that are covered by the Australian Curriculum?

**Tracey Davies:**

I have some notes here.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I think you've mentioned respectful relationships and sexual health as two general(topics).

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, and so if I think of things like consent, where we would see that in the early years of the Australian curriculum is around permission giving. So we would talk to our young people around what does that mean, what does it look like and wouldn't necessarily call it consent. So if you're an early years teacher and you would be setting up the norms perhaps in the at the beginning of your year, you would talk about how we're going to be respectful in the way that we give permission if someone wants to use some of our materials, they want to touch some of our possessions, and then if you were going to also implement the Child Protection Curriculum, you may have covered that area really well and you'll go on to the next focus area or the next topic.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So that child protection curriculum that you've mentioned now, can you tell us about that?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yes, sure. Sometimes it gets a bit confused with being a sexual health education curricula and it's really clearly not and we're quite clear about that. It is mandated in all public schools and preschools and it also is a mandated curricula in the Catholic education system and it's used nationally and internationally via a licence agreement with our Minister of Education. And, like I said, it aims to teach all children and young people that they have the right to be safe. It used to be called Keep Safe and it's now been changed to Be Safe. And that they can help themselves to be safe by talking about people they trust. It requires teachers to undertake a full day training to deliver the curricula and that is our preferred model because when you're working with these children and young people it's really important that the person that's delivering this curricula knows their people the best. They spend an enormous amount of time with them and it allows us a certain level of quality assurance that we're not just providing some materials and saying to people here, off you go. It provides them with the confidence, they get an opportunity to role model as part of the training and they get a chance to ask questions and relate it to their context. It is age and developmentally appropriate. It is evidence-based. We've just about to release the third edition of a review that has taken eighteen months where we have talked to our young people, talked to our teachers, talked to our experts, and I was saying before that sometimes and we've asked the questions of our own young people have you done any work in the child protection curriculum and they'll go no, never, we never do that and then we'll say have you talked about being respectful to each other and what respectful relationships look like oh yeah we do that all the time, you know our teacher does that all the time And it's always contemporary, so we've had to think about, in this new iteration, deep fakes, sexting, and what that means for our young people. And if I think back to 2008 when it was first mandated, certainly it has evolved as it needs to evolve. and it's always being updated and teachers get access to the portal which has all the resources once they're trained and they might not know the little nuance changes that we make it might be a new resource or something like that but certainly the major review we're now looking at what does that mean for training for next year because we will need to change the training to meet the new updated curriculum. So it talks about focus areas like keeping safe, your rights and responsibilities as a child and a young person, what does safe and unsafe look like and mean in a variety of settings. We talk about trusted networks, we talk about respectful relationships, we talk about power in relationships, we talk about recognising and reporting abuse, body integrity, understanding abuse and then we talk about protective strategies, how do you apply those strategies and how do you seek support.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

This is the South Australian curriculum.

**Tracey Davies:**

Absolutely.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Which you said is being used.

**Tracey Davies:**

Internationally, like 38 international schools around the world and certainly nationally also.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

it covers .. at what age does the curriculum start?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, at 3 through to year 10. However, this new edition we have listened to the experts and it will be available and there will be resources from birth to year 10. And people say

birth, it's how you start talking to these young people. For example, a team member was talking about their grandchild, picked them up and they're all wet and said, I'm just going to move you around behind the car here, I'm just going to change you so you're not wet and we can go on and do what we need to do. Or I'm going to change you but I'm now going to move you and the pin might prick you but it's going to be okay. So it's that language from birth through that we've listened to the experts across Australia and internationally who have said how young is too young? Obviously, like I said, we don't say to three-year-olds, we're now going to teach consent. We frame it in a way that is age appropriate.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you said it goes through to year 10, is that correct? Or is Keeping Safe through to 12?

**Tracey Davies:**

Year 10. There are some materials sorry for our 11 and 12's too which looks very different how that's taught in a senior secondary that's where schools most likely engage in an external provider to support them with the sexual health education given that the Australian curriculum is only up to year 10.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So we've got the topics under the Health and PE part of the Australian Curriculum and we've got this Keeping Safe Curriculum and they've got slightly different focuses but there's a fair overlap between the two.

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, we try and map them so that it's not doubling up for schools and they're able to combine the two bits so that no one misses out if they're away for a day or a couple of weeks and those things.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And I think you said this, but in government, public schools, the Keeping Safe and the Health and PE National Curriculum are mandatory.

**Tracey Davies:**

So is the early learning framework, which also has respectful relationships as a part of it.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So moving on to Catholic Ed now, if we can, with that background, what curricula, or is there one curriculum that Catholic schools are teaching in South Australia?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

So, as a lovely segue, we've got the Australian Curriculum version 9, we've got the Keeping Safe Curriculum, and there are updates coming out very soon.

**Tracey Davies:**

It is, yes, next week. We're a bit excited, yes.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yeah, and we've got the Sexuality and Respectful Relationships Curriculum, and we also have a Religious Education Curriculum. So, two curricula specific to Catholic schools, the Catholic school system, is that Religious Education Curriculum called Crossways, and sexuality and respectful relationships curriculum called Made in the Image of God. So what we have done, and I think we're all on the same field here, is we've mapped very carefully across all of those so that it's not parallel play and doubling up precisely because that would be nuts and schools are too busy and teachers are in a whirlwind anyway. Having said that, a critical part in this is pedagogy and the growing, the formation of teachers, a growing of teachers to have confidence and capacity in this area is a really critical piece.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Sorry to interrupt you, can you just explain what pedagogy is for anyone?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Sorry, the art and craft of teaching. The way that you teach.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So not what you teach, but how you teach.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

So looking at age appropriate, that's an important part of that, knowing what is age appropriate. So you listen to the expertise, so it's got to be data informed, and also it's the development and professional learning among teachers as well. And I guess another area that we're moving into now is helping parents grow in this area and giving them confidence to have those conversations with their own children as well, so that's another adjacent area, if you like, that's just beginning to develop. So and I guess the background for us is that, you know, it's been a fastly, it's been a swiftly moving dance floor over the last couple of years, over the last four or five years in terms of government legislation, what's happening there, what's happening, you know, in terms of what the experts are telling us, and also what's happening in the Catholic sphere in terms of a Bishop Statement came out in 2022, which were guidelines for gender and identity in Catholic schools, which was a document for all Catholic schools across Australia to support how do you pastorally support students who are gender diverse. So that's kind of the first statement that we've had. So that's another little piece. So in doing that, we've really granularly mapped, if that's a word that I've just made up, introduced today, we've mapped across all of the curricula. So you can see, and we've given you all of that information about where each intersect with each other and how they're taught.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then, so if teachers in your schools deliver the Made in the Image of God curriculum, they are delivering the Keeping Safe and the Australian Curriculum.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

If a school chooses to do some in the health and PE curriculum, that teacher, the health and PE teacher in a secondary college, they work very closely together, so they're like a team anyway. They know what each other are doing.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Is it correct that the curricula are covered, but through Made in the Image of God it's taught through the lens of Catholic principles and Catholic teaching? Can you explain a bit about how that works?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yes. Okay, so I'm just going to pick two things, two parts of all of that. So the theology of the child is about that human dignity, that every life is sacred, every child is sacred, every young person has dignity that can't be taken away from them. So that's a strong, deep teaching. Through reception, although you may not be using those words in reception, But that's what you're wanting to instil, so there's a theology or that's an understanding of God and God present in life, and part of that would be you cannot fall out of the hand of God, it doesn't matter what you do or who you are or how you are, you are somehow held. And then the other part of that is Catholic social teaching, which you mentioned. And Catholic social teaching is a very, very strong and significant tradition in the Catholic Church around the dignity of everyone, dignity of work, closely connected to the union movement, really. the dignity of every child, and in Catholic social teaching, some of those principles are about solidarity, are about respect, are about forgiveness, and so that's embedded in the curriculum as well. Does that answer your question?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Yes it does. You mentioned, perhaps if you can give us an example, when you said there's a direction, I think was the word you used, about gender and identity.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

The Guidelines of Bishops?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Yes, sorry.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yes so the strong theme in that document is the word pastoral and the word pastoral simply means care so and the current Pope, Pope Francis, who I'm pretty sure you will be all familiar with his you know the main characteristic of Pope Francis is about care for each other and compassion, care, being with, walking with, being open to, encounter and relationship with the other in respectfulness. And so that document is a pastoral document which is about how do you walk with. So it's not about how to manage students who are gender diverse, it's about how do we walk with any students in that particular context. And then some of the very practical things in it, you would find in any of our documents, in terms of sports, toilets, all of that sort of thing.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. So we'll move on to independent schools now, Ms Oliphant. In terms of the curricula being taught in independent schools, so you said earlier the schools must deliver the Australian curriculum as is required of all schools. Can you say anything beyond that about what independent schools in South Australia are teaching?

**Michele Oliphant:**

I guess, in agreement with what you've both said, I'd like to sort of add to what Tracey was saying. We know they will have topic areas that cover off on certain aspects of consent and respectful relationship education through the areas of health and PE, which are relationships and sexuality will cover consent, or within emotional awareness and regulation, or through the elements of safety, mental health and well-being and so forth, as well as through the elements of the personal and social capability which will cover off on things like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, social management. And I guess thinking about also the way you're talking about it more holistically, it's through lots of curriculum connections as well. So it might be through English literacy, the examination of a text, or it might be through a whole school. And to that end, where I'm coming to with that in terms of independent schools is thinking about the pedagogy and the way of teaching. The AISSA has also recently provided member schools with a Wellbeing toolkit, which was developed in partnership with Professor Donna Cross across in 2023. And so in terms of what we do know about our schools is since the launching of that toolkit, the AISSA ran four full days of professional learning sessions with Professor Cross and we had staff from over 45 schools attending that, as well as many additional schools attending bespoke sessions. And the toolkit, a bit similar to what you're talking about, it's a framework that ensures the elements of effective whole school wellbeing, implementation sites, the way a school is going to be implementing the Australian curriculum is successful, I guess. And it considers all sorts of factors within that such as, is the leadership engaged in the program that's being delivered? Do they have a representative action team in the school responsible for overseeing the delivery? Is the data being collected and audited? What programs, are they actually being effective? Are they delivering the outcomes intended? Also, factors like student voice, authentic community engagement, and I know we know our schools take community engagement very seriously and also thinking about ensuring that the context of the school is being implemented. So thinking about the pedagogical factors that all schools will consider, but certainly schools that have particular ways of delivering as the independent schools tend to, they will differentiate for particular learning styles, experiences, abilities, cultures, language, factors like trauma backgrounds and safety will all play a role and that's the sort of stuff that we know that we've had many members of our school attending these kind of sessions and interestingly certainly at those sessions that the AISSA ran it wasn't just health and PE teachers it was roles including classroom teachers,

principals, deputies, heads of learning areas, year level coordinators, you know, directors of wellbeing, all sorts of different positions within the school attend those kind of professional learnings, and I would suspect looking at our websites and seeing just how many, you know, of the schools are delivering Keeping Safe and other programs, they also showcase, they teach bespoke school specific and faith-based programs, as well as the delivery of programs that will cover off on aspects within the curriculum. There's a whole list of them that I saw, and I'm sure they're not all listed on the websites either. So I guess we know it's not an area that's necessarily dominated by health and PE teachers, it will tend to depend on the context of the school, how large the school is, a whole range of factors.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you're talking about how the health and PE curriculum is delivered across the school?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So that the different schools will do it differently.

**Michele Oliphant:**

That's correct.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

What about the Keeping Safe curriculum? Are you able to say whether independent schools are implementing that curriculum?

**Michele Oliphant:**

So, we know it's up to individual schools on how and whether they implement the Keeping Safe curriculum. However it is highly regarded and is endorsed by the AISSA and we provide member schools with a licence, Keeping Safe Child Protection Curriculum Resource Portal, which can be accessed by any of our members who have completed the training.

Again, we don't keep individual school data or records on that, but we do know that some staff in our member schools have completed the training and the data provided by the Department for Education on access to the portal indicates that over 1,400 of our members have accessed it, so that would suggest to me we have a very high uptake of our schools delivering it. Beyond that I can't say exactly figures.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you've all touched on, I think, this, the idea of programs or the way that the curricula are delivered. So, it's not obviously that, as I understand it, the curriculum or the curricula provide a framework, but then it's up to the school or the school sector as to how that's implemented. Is that correct?

Do schools use different programs or different providers to deliver this education?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yes, and can I make a big amendment? Child Protection is age 3 to year 12. The team will kill me for not saying that.

Absolutely, because when I mentioned before the Child Protection Curriculum isn't sexual health education. So whilst we talk about power and relationships, we talk about domestic and family violence, we don't talk about contraception, puberty, reproduction, reproductive health, sexual activity, sexual identities, sexual relationships, or sexually transmitted infections. That's not in our curriculum. So schools...

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

When you say our curriculum, you're talking about keeping safe. Those topics would be covered under the Australian Curriculum?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yes, but not sometimes to the depth and whether the teachers would have the confidence

to be able to deliver them in a meaningful, contextualised, most up-to-date way. And so that's where our secondary schools in particular will have the autonomy to engage with external providers. and there are a range of those depending on the school that support them to deliver the sexual health education piece. Some are very confident in schools and are delivering it within their school context. Others will engage outside providers and it gets back to that can't do everything and those sorts of things and there are some wonderful external providers out there who, that is their remit and they're very skilled and they're very good working with young people and those sorts of things.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

When we're talking about external providers and programs, is it correct that there's two aspects to that? One is who's actually teaching it in the classroom, and the other is the program or the framework of the lessons. And it might be that the school's teachers are still delivering it, but they are using a program developed by another organisation.

**Tracey Davies:**

Absolutely. And the new CR federal work, certainly that may change and we may be in a position where our teachers feel upskilled and confident enough to deliver it to their young people. So that's a really exciting piece and we've been out having forums with our young people around and it got back to some of them are being taught some of these topics but it's the way they're being delivered. They're like, yeah, they do it, but it's really boring. It's just a slide, you know, and those sorts of things. So that's been really useful information when we're developing these resources. And I know we're going to do some cross-sector conversations.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And thank you, and that's, you've said, Ms Oliphant, that's the same for AISSA, that different programs are used to teach the curriculum in different schools?

**Michele Oliphant**

Yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Is Catholic education slightly different? Because made in the image of God covers that?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yes, so our underlying principle is that the teacher knows their students best, the classroom teacher knows their students best, especially in the primary setting, reception and primary, and so they are best placed to know their kids in the classroom, and also to know, part of that is knowing if there would be any triggers for their children in the class because they know them. So they are best placed to teach sexuality and respectful relationships in that broadest understanding of it. In the Made in the Image of God program there are four threads, identity, relationships, human development and reproduction and reproductive health. So those things are covered in quite a bit of detail where they're not covered elsewhere and naturally that needs particular training of teachers, so all teachers who are teaching that are expected to do specific professional learning, which is provided by the system, provided by the office centrally, and there are several days and several opportunities across the year to do that. They are schools at the same time, and particularly in this, we're calling it in some ways a transition period because we are hoping that classroom teachers develop more confidence and capacity in teaching themselves, simply because we do believe they know their students best. And, having said that, there are times and instances, of course, where schools, colleges, secondary schools particularly, want to outsource or look for external providers around a specific area. So, in our setting, the experience around that has been a bit uneven, and again, it's all about the quality of the provider and the capacity they have, and in our setting, the capacity they have to understand our curriculum and the context within which it's being taught. So we developed

a set of what we call parameters. So they're a set of protocols, guidelines, parameters for any school if they are engaging an external provider. We got the support of an excellent external provider in helping develop that, so that we co-developed and tested it, if you like. And that was, I think that was a very wonderful collaboration actually. They've been extremely well received by schools and they've also, as is the curriculum, has been extremely well received by other Catholic systems around Australia. So...

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

This is the Made in the Image of God curriculum?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yeah, that curriculum and also these parameters in particular as a tool. I should say though, I must say, I know I said it in the documentation we provided you, the Crossways Curriculum and the Made in the Image of God Curriculum have both had two theological reviews. So they are still in fact in draft form. The Archbishop and Bishop need to sign them off, give them what we call imprimata before they just become public documents if you like. but they have certainly been used, but I should say that they are still in draft form formally.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And just while we're on the topic of reviews, you said there's a theological review, have they had...

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

And a pedagogical review as well, thank you, yes. So they both had pedagogical review as well. And that's testing, you know, is it age appropriate, what are those resources like at each age? Is there expertise shown in terms of how it's taught, as well as the content?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And that's your religious education curriculum called Crossways and then the Made in the Image of God

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yeah, the sexuality and respectful relationships curriculum.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

If we can just go back then to who, I'll ask one of the others, who's teaching these topics in the schools. Ms Oliphant, is it up to the individual school?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Yeah, and I think you raise a really good point that I think from what I can see, as I said, you know, based on really looking at, you know, talking to people in the association and also looking at who's attending our training and talking to people and looking at their websites, I think when our schools are getting external providers, we know, we can see we've got, you know, heads of wellbeing, we've got pastoral care roles, we've got counsellors, we've got people in social emotional learning type roles who are actually in partnership with the external provider delivering these things. And the other thing that I've noticed is quite strong, so thinking about when the external provider is coming in to the school, it's not in absence of the school being involved in those programs being delivered. And I know that our schools very often, from what I can see, also run education sessions for their parents and their community members in tandem when programs like this are being delivered so that they can actually form a partnership, which we know that when students are way more likely to engage in this information if it's delivered in a way that they connect to, that's age appropriate, but also that their parents are engaged in and understand. And when we think about whole school delivery, it's also whole of community. So what a child is learning at school, if that's being reinforced in the home. So I can say that I've seen many examples on the websites of where schools have run sessions for their parents, families, communities in tandem with those kinds of programs. And I think also going back to, we do know with a lot of our specialist schools that they are working very hard to adapt, to co-

design with their communities the delivery of their programs and particularly in the context of, for some of our schools, wellbeing is the first priority, probably for many of them in fact. So that sort of need to ensure that they're delivering these kinds of things in partnership and in a way that the students are going to connect with is for our specialists, our flexible learning schools and so forth, it's fundamental and it's the underpinning of the philosophies of a lot of our schools.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

In terms of external providers, is it correct, there's not one set of criteria, there's nothing mandated. The schools will, we assume, select based on their context and their needs as you've just explained.

**Michele Oliphant:**

As I understand it, that's correct and, you know, they will, from what I can see, that's exactly what they're doing.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And public schools?

**Tracey Davies:**

Just following on from what you said, our preferred method is, and that's why we love the child protection curriculum, because we train our teachers to deliver what they know and the young people they know and the families. Likewise that would be our best advice and we have some guidelines around any external provider that or incursion that comes into a school setting, there's a list, a bit of a checklist about what's best practice to do. So it just doesn't cover this topic. But mid this year the Minister for Education asked us to have and develop a preferred providers list for sexual health education in our schools. And that was from learnings from a situation that happened in a school. And so what has happened and what has transpired, there's been a full procurement process where external providers were invited to present their program, their curricula, their activities, their resources, and from that, my understanding, it was a very rigorous process. It's not definitive. It doesn't mean that organisations who are not on this first or this second round of preferred providers won't go on next iterations but right now for schools to engage in sexual health education they must only go to the preferred providers list.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Is this the first time?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, certainly, certainly, yes and we have an engagement and wellbeing preferred providers list, and schools can choose to use people who aren't on that but also you need to then be doing your risk mitigations using those guidelines that we've got but for the sexual health education, it is the preferred providers list at this stage and like I said that'll be ever evolving and it's not static but yes that was yeah the first time.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So as I understand, correct me if I'm wrong, the preference is that classroom teachers or internal teachers will be trained and then they will deliver the

**Tracey Davies:**

Or co-design, co-deliver, because they do know the young people the best. They know if it's a touch point or those sorts of things. But there was a range of criteria.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then when you say there's a range of criteria, you're talking about external providers who may come in to assist.

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Moving on, we spoke about this with you Dr Gowdie, but evaluations or assessment or reviews. Can I ask the others about reviews or assessments of programs being taught. Ms Oliphant, perhaps if I can start with you because I know if the different schools are offering different programs it will obviously depend. Is AISSA involved in any review of the programs being used or anything like that?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Well, certainly now my role is involved, certainly in the future, yes, in terms of if you wanted me to describe my role, I can. Yes. I guess my role is a pretty exciting one and I think as I understand it, it's the only role in the country that's a collaboration between two jurisdictions which will give us an opportunity to look at the ways in which we can apply the principles and processes of high-quality evidence-based consent, respect for relationships, education across a broad variety of contexts and cohorts and allow us to tap into the expertise of a really wide range of schools. So in the first instance in my role, we'll be offering schools the opportunity to participate in a pilot which will examine the evidence-based and contextualised ways of implementing CRRE as outlined in the curriculum, but by using their own philosophies and approaches to do this.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

CRRE is consent and respectful relationships education?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Respectful relationships, sorry, yes. And the pilot's going to take a two-phased approach. So phase one of it, it's going to focus on the development of whole school approaches based on age-appropriate evidence-based materials delivered through the lens of, as I mentioned earlier, the AISSA Wellbeing Toolkit, so the way that we implement with action learning cycles supported by myself through in-school visits, school established online communities of practise and run professional learning events. And then Phase 2 will continue with this but will add then through the co-design process of engaging with the school communities, the students and so on, expert external consent and respectful relationships education providers, data collection and enhanced professional learning and sharing of practise examples between the schools. So, we plan to provide opportunities for schools from wide and varied backgrounds to participate in a community and practise and share their experiences of implementing the programs with each other as well, not just with myself, because I think learning from each other and understanding that there's going to be, you know, like... aspects of curriculum, there's some fundamental underpinnings that everyone will be implementing. So learning what's the core base and what's ways that schools are adapting for culture, for community, for context and how are they doing it so that we can set up some clear here's some baseline processes and protocols and here's some good ways to contextualise that are simple. As you said, schools are really busy, so we want to set something up that is viable for all schools to be able to use.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and that's your goal moving forward?

**Michele Oliphant:**

That's the goal.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Yes. Ms Davies, coming to you in relation to public schools and reviews or assessments or evaluations, you've mentioned external providers and now you've got a preferred or a providers list, an approved providers list, excuse me. Is there some sort of evaluation or assessment process for those providers, do you know?

**Tracey Davies:**

I would imagine individual schools would do pre-survey, post-survey, conversations with their young people after each lesson, give feedback. What do you want to know of more?

What would you like next time? Without knowing the content explicitly about those external providers, that's what the good practice would be and that's what the guidelines would recommend. Before each session, have a look at the content, the teaching staff and the provider. Is there any touch points we need to know about? Do we need to follow up a bit more from what we did last time? Schools and providers are very, very good it doing that and they work alongside because it's in the best interest of the external provider for their work to be complementary to the school. But in terms of child protection curriculum, we do an evaluation after every training that we deliver. We ask our teachers to get feedback from the young people if we've introduced a new resource or we've introduced some new parts, and that'll be a really big part of this new training and the release of the new materials for next year, certainly around the cyberbullying, the deep fakes, and it might be things like, would you like to have known more, or could we have delivered this lesson in a better way, without sort of giving them a survey and those sorts of things. Internally, I know the team are always talking to the Australian Curriculum H&PE managers, but also amongst themselves, making sure it's at the most contemporary resource, something will be released nationally or internationally. We might have a Teams meeting with someone from Queensland to say, this has just come past our desk. Any thoughts, any comments? And likewise having the conversations in our own homes around is it age appropriate, is it developmentally where it needs to be things like at what age do we start naming body parts correctly? Conversations like that the team have all the time and that's based on evidence and research and we know certainly the younger that can be taught to our young people the more beneficial it is to them moving forward around being safe and those sorts of things.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

You mentioned in there feedback from young people after they receive this education. Is that something that, and you've also mentioned review, regular reviews of the curriculum, so is feedback from young people something that's taken into account?

**Tracey Davies:**

Categorically. I know with the new CRREwork it will be interesting to see what your young people are saying to you, but it was very much around the delivery. And also I think starting to name and recognise what parts of the curriculum are actually being taught and how do we actually ensure that our young people and children have confidence that they are being delivered their entitlement. And if they're not, to be able to have the capacity to say, hey, we should be learning about that, and we're actually not. So that's something that we've talked about too. So permission giving, at what age do we start to call it, I give you consent to. So there's lots of internal, external. And then there's of course consulting with our experts too, because they're doing some wonderful work in that space too and we can all be better when we know better.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Experts, do you mean, what, education experts?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, education experts, health experts, our support and inclusion experts within our department, our wellbeing and engagement.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So education experts but also subject matter.

**Tracey Davies:**

Absolutely and we've just started a new directorate, it's called Learning and Design within Curriculum Development around co-designing some learning and those sorts of things which is just going to be fabulous for a range of our programs that we deliver. What does it truly look like, student agency, student voice.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Still on the topic of student voice, we've heard, the Royal Commission has heard some suggestions around the benefits of consulting with young people when developing the relationships and sexuality curriculum, curricula. Do you have any views on that Ms Davies?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, I think it's really important to listen to what they're asking and then with a lens around does it fit developmentally, is it age appropriate, is it contemporary, is it factual and one of the things that we perhaps have listened to is our children and young people want to know things earlier and want to have the conversations and the discussions a bit earlier, not at the age that we have been delivering it or thinking about it or talking about it. And so I think that's something that we've really taken on board. They want to know around what are the laws at an age before they reach the age and what are the implications and those sorts of things. But it's more around for us how they'd like us to deliver this really important learning for them that we get the most benefit out because we're the, I guess, the deliverers and the co-constructors and the designers and need to be, but it's more around how's this going to make a difference for you and how's it actually going to meet your needs that we really look forward to getting more and more and more of, because if we're not hitting the money then, you know, we're actually doing our children and young people a disservice.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

What about you, Dr Gowdie? Are the views of children and young people taken into account, or any views about young people helping or assisting to design a curriculum?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yeah, there has been in developing our two curricula. At the moment though, we're just finishing the development of a model for a student agency, a system model for a student agency, and there are a number of initiatives under my directorate that we've begun which has a line of sight with that approach in different areas. We're also developing and have had our first meeting just last Friday as part of the development of a student advisory body and obviously that will gather student voice and that student advisory body and the way that we gather their voices is not through the designated captains or designated leaders, just students, So there's that and as part of the consent funding, the recent consent funding that we've just been given over five years, Catholic Education South Australia is collaborating with Catholic Education Northern Territory, is pooling our consent funding and so we've got three key things. So some, with their funding, are employing someone to progress this area. We've chosen at this stage not to do that and we've got three key activities if you like. And the first one is we're engaging with Curtin University to develop survey tools for parents, students, staff, and that is around what are the needs regarding consent and respectful relationships education and that will include how would you, how do we want to hear this? How do we need to hear it?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Ms Oliphant, I don't know if you can add anything to the conversation.

**Michele Oliphant:**

Just to reiterate on the approach that we will be taking is certainly the collection of data is fundamental to what we're doing. So when we're working with the schools, obviously schools can choose whether or not they participate in this project, but the schools who do, we will be looking for them to be co-designing with us exactly the approach of how do you find out that what you're doing is working, how do you consult, how do you establish that you know both using survey tools but other forms of collection that what you're delivering is actually achieving? How do you know engaging authentic student and community voice? What concepts need to be taught? And then are they actually being taught in the way we

think they're being taught? All of those kinds of things, you know, we will be working with our schools to see what's going to be the most benefit of this position to achieve the outcomes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. I'm going to change topics a little bit now to whether parents can opt out of the programs or lessons for their children. Starting with you, Ms Oliphant, are you able to give us any indication? Is it up to the individual schools?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Yeah, I mean we don't collect this information, however the AISSA is obviously very supportive of all students engaging with programs offered by schools of this nature and we certainly advise member schools to work closely in partnership with their families and their parents to make informed choices. Independent schools typically have a very high level of parent engagement because of the nature of the schooling system and we are aware that many member schools do offer parent and community information and education sessions prior to them or parallel to them running these kind of programs. So that would suggest to us that our schools strongly encourage participation but I can't categorically say not having data on whether they do opt out or what that looks like.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. And Catholic schools?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yes, so one of the basic tenets of Catholic education is that parents are the first educators of their children, and so parents have the right and they are supported in that if they wish to remove their children from particular classes or particular program in this area. A letter will go to parents, or a communication I should say, certainly, or different kinds communication will go to parents to let them know that this sexuality and respectful relationships curriculum will be being taught usually it will be in the term three of a year not in the first half of the year so that so they will have that well ahead of it being taught and then they can make a decision and whether they want to have their child or whether they choose to do that teaching around that area themselves.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And for public schools, you've said that the Keeping Safe Curriculum is mandated, so is it correct that parents cannot opt out?

**Tracey Davies:**

Absolutely.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

What about the sexual health education or whatever else is taught?

**Tracey Davies;**

Yes, sure. And just like we've mentioned, parents, carers and we extend it now to communities. Really important information and support for our young people. So before sexual health education is delivered with students, the Principal and the Governing Council must determine the consent process to be used, whether it's passive or active, and strategies for informing the parents, carers and the community. For example, passive consent is where the parents or carers and or community are informed about the program and can request an exemption but a signed consent is not required. So we're going to be having these people come into our school, you opt out, not signed to say you opt in, versus active consent where parents or caregivers are informed about the program and signed consent is required and an exemption can be requested from the principal. So we're going to deliver this program, do you give consent for your child to take part? If the form doesn't come back signed, therefore it's assumed they are not giving consent, so they do a follow-up and do a follow-up and do a follow-up.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And did you say, sorry, that it is up to the school how they go they go about that?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yes, they would talk about it at their governing council with their leadership team if the principal's not there. This is the rationale for doing it, this is why we're doing it, this is where it fits in the work that we're doing now and then it's either active or passive consent. But there is no opting out of the Australian Curriculum version 9 or Keeping Safe Child Protection Curriculum.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Other than the sexual health education, which you've spoken about.

**Tracey Davies:**

Which isn't part of that, yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And why, if you're able to explain, why the difference between the mandated keeping safe versus the sexual health education?

**Tracey Davies:**

Because Keeping Safe Child Protection Curriculum isn't sexual health education. So because it's a Keeping Safe Curriculum, mapped to Australian Curriculum version 9, delivered by our teachers, trained to our teachers, then it is not an option for families, communities, or carers to opt out. We believe every child and young person has the right to be safe along with the UN rights of the child.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And is it correct that there are education regulations that allow...

**Tracey Davies:**

That's the safeguarding regulation policy.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

opting out for the sexual health.

**Tracey Davies:**

Yes. Yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

One final topic, if I may, and that's this type of education, or how does this type of education work for children with intellectual disabilities or different cognitive abilities or indeed children for whom English is not their first language, Aboriginal children, any of those groups of people. Ms Davies, can you help us first? How is that dealt with in this education area?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, the Child Protection Curriculum used to have different modules, different resources for the different cohorts, so for students with disability, for Aboriginal learners, from EALD, and part of this review, we decided that teachers don't need to be accessing four different modules, four different types of resources, that good teaching is good teaching for all. So we work really closely with Aboriginal Voice, we have an Aboriginal Voice group of educators within our department, we work with Social and Inclusion, we work with our schools and many experts who are of the same belief that whether you are from EALD, an Aboriginal learner, a student with disability, that good teaching is good teaching for all. That doesn't mean there aren't specific resources at the back of each module or in between each focus area that explicitly, for example, how might a child with a disability, non-verbal, be able to articulate that they're feeling unsafe. There are different ways where you would explicitly teach that, talk about that, versus those students who are verbal. And we've been to the Youth Education Centre and we have worked with those teachers there and we also quite often do bespoke training for teachers, certainly in our remote lands, understanding that they're quite transient, so we will go to the lands for the new teachers that might join in

the middle of a term, might be four or six of them, and there's also some bridging resources so they can get started until they've had the full day training and those sorts of things. But that's part of that review, making sure it's accessible to every child and young person.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and then the individual teachers need to adapt to make sure it is accessible?  
And for the Catholic approach?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yes, both. And probably also to say that where you have particular identified groups who might need differentiated teaching or different, be mindful of different context. I think that's where parents and carers, the connection with parents and carers and the community, the child's community can be very important. With the consent funding that's just been rolled out. The third activity that we are looking at is developing professional learning and resources for identified groups, including but not limited to students with a disability and Indigenous students. So part of the collaboration with Catholic Education Northern Territory is because they have a large number of schools with indigenous students and so we're helping them and they're helping us as well develop, they would have the best expertise in this area and so that will also help the schools across our remote areas and regional areas in particular as well as in the urban areas where we have large numbers of indigenous children.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So the same approach as the Education Department, that the curriculum is the same but the delivery might be adapted.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yes. I think that good teaching is good teaching, that's true. And a good teacher, you know your students, you know this one needs that, I know what the needs of this child are, and I know the context and background of this child. And so teachers do that, a good teacher does that all of the time. But having said that, there's also a place for very specific professional learning around particular areas, particularly around sexuality, teaching sexuality and respectful relationships and in those two identified groups, students with disability and indigenous students, I think there are very particular contexts for them that teachers need, you know, I think you can't have enough professional, teachers will seek it anyway, professional learning around that and resourcing.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Ms Oliphant, are you able to give us any information about what independent schools are doing in this space?

**Michele Oliphant:**

Not specifically, I guess what I can say is we do have majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school member schools and we do have specialist schools as member schools and we do know that that is exactly what they do, that is they differentiate their teaching and learning for their students and they are experts in doing that. We, being the nature of the association, I can't comment specifically on how they do or what they do. I can say that we hope to deliver, you know, an approach to consent and respectful relationship education that draws on those expertise and draws on that ability to look at particular, you know, socio-economic backgrounds, but also socio-cultural backgrounds and also cognitive backgrounds and differences and look at how do you take the core curriculum and differentiate it appropriately in a way that we want to make sure every single learner is able to access the outcomes that we all need.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. Commissioner, I have no further questions of the panel.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you. I actually have a few, if you'll indulge me for a few moments. Ms Oliphant, you had me at data. Counsel Assisting has done a wonderful job of exploring the issues that I'm particularly concerned about, evidence-based evaluation, etc. But I'm not just curious as to the evaluation of the curricula. I'm wondering if you have any understanding or anecdotally, or has been assessed in some way, the impact of these courses on our young people, and I know this probably needs a long-term assessment, but are we seeing real impact in terms of young people's understanding of what constitutes inappropriate behaviour? What's their understanding of domestic, family, sexual violence? Is their attitude and understanding of respectful, ethical, equal relationships, is that improving? I'm wondering if there are trends or if there's any assessments apart from those overarching national community attitude assessments that we are ready to.

**Michele Oliphant:**

That you're asking me, Commissioner?

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

I'm asking all three of you if you have an opinion.

**Michele Oliphant:**

I think certainly that's something I intend to look at in quite a bit of detail in this role. I think a data driven approach to this role is fundamental to actually see are we, that's the purpose I think is saying can we actually see that we are delivering, this is primary prevention and we know that in primary prevention it is quite difficult long term to say it is what we've taught down here making a difference to behaviours we're seeing over here. That is certainly difficult but I think what I will be interested in looking at is the evidence base around what can we measure, what is being seen to be effective and therefore what are the kinds of things that schools already have a good idea of the things they're doing that they are seeing outcomes for, and I'll certainly be interested in looking at what are the specific behaviours of concern that schools are seeing that they would like to make a difference in, and how do we look at the programs that are trying to address that and see whether implementing that is making a difference. I can't comment on what is occurring right now though.

**Tracey Davies:**

Commissioner, we've got anecdotal evidence that, unfortunately, you never want to come across, but we had a young person just recently who, through the teaching of child protection curriculum, was able to make a report because she wasn't aware that what was happening to her was not normal and articulated that, and thankfully it went through the Court process and that person is now in jail. And we have also anecdotal evidence from international schools and from national schools where people have written in to us to say as a result of us delivering. And I think one of the most powerful things is the fact that our young people feel confident to have a voice. They are asking for this information to be taught to them. We did a consultation in Clare a couple of weeks ago and they just absolutely have an appetite and were saying things to us like, well how truthful can we be? You know, and we were like, we need to know, we really need to know, but de-identify and, you know, just around what was happening in their learning and teaching space and those things. And if I think back to when I went to school or when I was teaching in a school, I'm not so sure our young people had the confidence that they'd be listened to or they'd be asked. And certainly, we work off the preface that when we know better, we do better. And I think we're in a really good place that lots of the young people we're talking to and the schools as well, and community members that there's a real appetite and yeah, so we have lots of anecdotal. school and we know that sometimes through a new school, whole school mapping or a school that's not in South Australia who implements a child protection curriculum, there is an increase in behaviours that are reported that the young people now recognise that aren't okay, they don't feel safe in a range of settings, so, yeah, but, yeah,

that's, and we hang on to, you know, yeah.

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yeah. Anecdotally, yes. You know, you can hear, you can tell yourself that differences, there are changes and there are differences, and young people feel more empowered, I guess. But I think education can't do everything, and as you would know, culture eats strategy for breakfast. So while they can know, and while within a school community context, they can feel that way, outside of that, the stronger messages they're getting, either from home and from the broader culture, and the broader social milieu, can act very strongly and decisively against it, so you might get a young woman in school who is very empowered and has a very strong voice and when you see that same young woman in a social context, she can fold under the pressure, she can freeze in all kinds of situations, so that's a very specific example but I just you know schools as we can hear are leaning in so hard in this area and doing so very much but schools can't do everything and I think that broader yeah the broader cultural issues it's really hard to shift and I think that's why you know I'm very strong about I feel quite strongly about But, you know, as I said right at the beginning, penetrating that dentine layer in young girls and young boys to really embed in themselves and for each other a sense of dignity. When you just implant that really, really early, you hope that when that young woman, who is so strong within a school community, goes outside of it, she will be respected and she will feel the power of her own respect. So I just, you know, it's just that small rider. We can measure how well we are doing PD, we can measure that all schools are implementing curriculums, we can measure that a teacher in almost every class has the required competence and capacity, and that all kids are hearing the same things. We can measure all that, but how young people hear it in the different contexts.

**Michele Oliphant:**

I think that sort of has just made me, just to add one little point around the data, the kinds of data that we know our schools are already collecting, that I will be drawing from as well, is that whole school approach. So it's not just about the program being delivered, but it's around a lot of things that sit outside of it as well. Is there an ability to adapt and co-design for the cohort, is there authentic student voice and community engagement, is the program delivery, does it have explicit teaching but also opportunities for skill rehearsal outside, opportunities to practise and talk, so you might be teaching a skill around consent, is that language being replicated in the playground when they go home, when they go to the canteen and you know when something gets taken off them. So there's lots of different ways we can look at data and look at ways of examining, not just saying we've got a survey here that says we taught this and is it five star rating on what we think about it. We have to look at a lot of different aspects to it.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Yes, we're certainly hearing that that primary prevention requires that whole of the community in a matter of faceted approach. Was that culture eats strategy for breakfast?

**Dr Jill Gowdie:**

Yes

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Oh, okay, I can see the title of the report coming on. I have one more question. It's just a supplementary to Counsel Assisting's question to you, Ms Davies, regarding the Keeping Safe program and that differentiation, so providing information about domestic violence, family violence. I'm just curious where the issues of, say, harassment, sexual harassment, sexual assault and violence comes in. I mean I would understand if people are doing consent education as part of the sexuality curriculum, but I'm wondering what, you know, what happens in those cases and also what does happen in terms of, you know, your

workforce is a pretty tightly worked one when people do present with a concern or a complaint and you've mentioned one anecdotal incident, but what happens if students respond to this curriculum in that immediate way and thus seek intervention or own intervention? How do you manage that?

**Tracey Davies:**

Yeah, that's why the fact that we train the teachers for a full day before they can deliver it, so it's to talk about some of those nuances and sometimes we get a principal who will ring the team and say, look we've just talked to the community about today, for example in the early years, we talked about power in relationships and or safe touch, unsafe touch, private space and the grandparent has come, you know, and said, you know, my child came home and said that they don't have to give me a hug or a kiss if they don't want to because my body is my body and my space is my space and so it's just, we use a couple of those examples in the training in case that situation happens and talk through it but that's not always the case and we're always on hand to support, or when a family might say and not really understand when you talk about child protection curriculum, if there's been an incident with a family or someone they know and it hasn't gone particularly well, it's around how we communicate what's in the curriculum and the content and talking through and having that really good relationship with the family or the community to say, look, you know, this is how it's delivered, this is the intent, these are the modifications and it might be because the teacher knows that class really well and those students really well, but what they were going to deliver, they pivot and they deliver something else in that time, and they'll make those determinations. And we talk about power in relationships as early as reception in Year 2, and that goes all the way through to 10s and 12s where it's around power in relationships, domestic and family violence. We talk about domestic and family violence in the middle years as well, Year 6 to 9, and that's when cyber abuse and cyber safety comes in at Year 3, and we talk about secrets in the early years from R to 2, that's where it is, but yeah, it's about that relation, and often we'll have some children of faith or children from a different country where they have different rules, laws, and so it's just about talking to them about the importance and why it's mandated, just like we would say that swimming's a part of the curriculum and we advise everyone and we would make modifications to make sure the change rooms allow them to change appropriately and those sorts of things. They're not changing in front of everyone and those sort of things. It's about alleviating fear, myths, misconceptions, but the importance about this could help your young person anywhere. Walking to school one day and those sorts of things. That's a really important part of the work and the training and just being available to schools at any time should they want us to support them.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you for that specificity. I appreciate your response. In fact, I appreciate the comprehensive responses that you provided us with today, and I apologise that we kept you out of time. We suspected this session might. Counsel Assisting, do you have any further questions of witnesses?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I don't Commissioner, I'd ask that they all be excused.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

You're free to go. Thank you. I suggest that we take a 10 minute break and re-adourn around 11.45.

Welcome back to the third day of public hearings for the Royal Commission into Domestic Family and Sexual Violence. I'll hand over to Council Assisting for our next witness.

**Witness:**  
**Dr Tessa Opie**

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you, Commissioner. I call Dr Tessa Opie.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

Do you truly and solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Say, I do truly and solemnly affirm.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I do truly and so solemnly affirm.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

And please state your full name.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Dr Tessa Mary Opie.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Dr Opie, is that doctor because you have a PhD?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can you tell us what that PhD is in?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

It was looking at all sorts of issues affecting health care in remote Aboriginal communities.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you are the founder of In Your Skin?

**Dr Tessa Opie**

Yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

What's In Your Skin?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

In Your Skin is a relationships and sexuality education service. We provide student education. We provide parent and carer information evenings and webinars. We provide professional development for principals and for school counsellors, for teachers. We provide other services additional to that within sort of upper primary and secondary school contexts, but for the purposes of today that's most relevant, I think.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and you've been an expert consultant for various education departments in relation to sexuality and relationships education.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yeah, that's right. So I guess in a consultancy capacity I have worked with a number of jurisdictional education departments. I also presented my work on best practice consent education at the National Health and Physical Education Curriculum Leaders Forum. I was also a consultant for the recently developed Federal Consent Policy Framework. So yeah, I guess there's some consultancy work as well within your scheme.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

When you said you presented your work, is that published work that you've conducted?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Um...

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Or is it different?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

It's slightly different in terms of, it's sort of, it is in the process, so we're still looking very much at what is considered best practice consent education, which I might get to speak to a bit later.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Indeed, but you're familiar with the literature in this area and studies and you have published yourself?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely, yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And is it correct that you've also worked with and developed programs for young people with language disorders, autism, refugee young people?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes, and that's probably a good point for us to talk about at the beginning, but yes, we're in the process of curriculum development for young people with language disorder. We have also worked closely with Adelaide Secondary School of English, working with refugee young people because that's quite a, I guess, complex area in terms of relationships and sexuality education. We've worked with young people in juvenile justice facilities. We've worked with young Aboriginal people within Aboriginal schools. We have also worked with young people in alternative education contexts, but I'm glad you raised it because I think today in terms of speaking about the young people's voices that I might be representing in terms of some of your questions, overwhelmingly the stuff I'll be speaking to is our opinions and perspectives of young people in mainstream schooling contexts.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And so, as you mentioned, you have engaged with children and young people frequently, received their feedback and their views about this education.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Frequently, frequently run focus groups with students to make sure that we're relevant, we are age appropriate, yeah, and that we are equipping them with the skills they need to be able to safely navigate and negotiate their relationships, including sexual activity for some older students.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I understand that schools have engaged you to review their curricula, and that's across government, Catholic and independent schools?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

That's correct.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And in particular, you conducted a review of relationships and sexuality education in public schools quite recently?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes, I was engaged by the Education Department. I was approached two years ago now and invited to work as a consultant and part of that work, I mean it was multifaceted but part of that work was running student focus groups to hear young people's opinions on how they wanted relationships and sexuality education to be delivered specifically but also it was a literature review, looking at what is best practice in terms of delivery per se and then synthesising both that kind of, yeah, exactly right.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So when you say literature review, we're talking evidence-based studies.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

That's right.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you, and one last thing by way of introduction, what age levels or year levels do you work with specifically?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I work with Year 5 students all the way through to Year 12 students. I've also developed with someone in Queensland, another sexuality educator, an evidence-based trauma-informed plug-and-play curriculum that's used nationally for Year 7 through to Year 12. That really kind of takes the load off the teacher.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then, just by way of introduction, the terminology you would have heard in the opening and this morning. We're using the terminology relationships and sexuality education for today, but we understand that plays to mean the broad spectrum of sexuality, consent, sexual health, respectful relationships, child protection, under that umbrella.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yeah, I understand.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So the first thing I want to ask you about is the context within which young people are being educated in this space and the quickly changing landscape is what the Commission has heard about the young people's community, I suppose. Are you able to talk to that a little bit?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes, certainly, and I think this is probably what keeps me so interested in this area is that it is rapidly evolving and despite our very best efforts to be providing young people with very targeted and evidence-based sexual health and safety education or respectful relationships education, relationships and sexuality education, we are seeing declining sexual health outcomes for our young Australians, so we are seeing increases in STIs, we're we are seeing decreases in consistent and effective condom use. We are seeing increases in negative sexual experiences, unwanted sex and sexual assault amongst our high school students. And we are also working with young people who are, I guess, experience new and ever-evolving forms of image-based sexual abuse, including AI-generated synthetic child exploitation material. and so we know that possibly our relationships and sexuality education probably just has to be a bit more expansive to make sure that we're keeping up with the context for our young people. You know, I think there are additional concerns there in terms of, you know, the manosphere, men's rights activism, and so, you know, I think that there is this online community that are exploiting many adolescent males' insecurities, you know, and trying to sort of drag them towards a men's rights ideology. So, whilst misogyny is nothing new, whilst sexual violence is nothing new, I think the avenues and the ways in which this can manifest these days are very, very different.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and changing rapidly with technology?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And so, it's probably obvious to say that that's the context within which young people need to be taught and curricula and programs are being developed.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Very much so and I think probably it would be, I think we also need to acknowledge exposure to online pornography as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So today I want to ask you about, in your view, some of the important aspects of this type of education, what good looks like, in your view, and that's based on your experience, the

reviews that you've conducted, the literature that you've reviewed, and the young people that you've spoken to. If we can start quite generally in terms of a curriculum, leaving aside the content, have you got any observations about the structure of a curriculum, generally speaking?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yeah, I do have some ideas here. I think as well it's worth mentioning that I've also for many, many years and continue to work with students every day as well, so I deliver this education myself. I think that there are a lot of teachers out there doing a tremendous job. I think teachers have huge loads. I think the expectation that they also become specialists in relationships and sexuality education is often unrealistic. I think of, you know, for example, I use the analogy of going to a relationships therapist and I don't necessarily know that I'd be overly thrilled about seeing a relationships therapist who received one or two days of training. It is a huge area of expertise, of knowledge. It's one that I dedicate my full-time job to and I'm learning every single day what I don't know. I would love to see relationships and sexuality education as a stand-alone subject. I would like to see it removed from health and physical education, from that part of the curriculum. I would like to see it as standardised. And I would like to see it as a subject area, and I make a very deliberate point here, where there is a very clear distinction between the values of the teacher and the health and safety needs of the learners.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can I ask you a bit about, you said, standardised? Do you mean standardised across the whole national curriculum?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes, ideally yes. I think that there should be capacity, you know, if there was a dedicated person in this role there's capacity to contextualise that, whether we're talking about religious or cultural backgrounds, whether we're talking about students with language disorder for example, alternative education settings, whatever that might be, I think it can be contextualised and it should be contextualised in terms of being trauma informed, culturally sensitive, in terms of best practice broadly, but I would like to see a nationally standardised standalone curriculum.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And why is that important, to have something standardised?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Because we're talking very objectively about health and safety and I think that all young people, if you want to increase their health and safety or their chances of being healthier and safer and decreasing their chances of exposure to sexual violence, either as someone engaging in that or someone experiencing that, a victim survivor, we need to take that very seriously and they need to all have the same access to the same education.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

With the absence of any values influencing it?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely one hundred percent. Yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

We heard witnesses who gave evidence previously talking about the impact of culture outside of schools, perhaps working against what's being educated in schools. Is it fair to say that if the curriculum is standard, then that goes some way to meeting any external influence?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I think so, and I think maybe there's just, as we've talked about pedagogy, so far today there are different ways of actually delivering that, ways that perhaps are more culturally

sensitive for example. I think school's the best place for this, students spend, you know, students who are lucky enough to be attending school are there 30, 35 hours a week, and most of these students are not having these conversations at home. Many students are perhaps, as you're saying, are having conversations at home that run counter to evidence-based health and safety initiatives, so I think schools are best placed to be having these conversations.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you mentioned evidence-based, do I assume that if we are having a standardised national curriculum or program it should be based in evidence?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely, yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Changing topic slightly to the involvement of young people to design a curriculum or programs, the Commission has some reports that you've prepared which recommend that young people should be included to design a curriculum and also the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly, has recommended similar. In what way do you suggest young people can and should be involved to design a curriculum?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Firstly, I think it's important because I often see in this space very well-intended adults viewing this area of education through a very adult lens. And schools theoretically work within a framework of being child-focused and child-centred and I think that really needs to transfer or translate to talking about relationships and sexuality as well. So I think it's really fundamentally important that if we're teaching this to our young people, firstly, we have a very sound understanding of their reality and the context within which they are interrelating with each other. You know, I think that, for example, many of us might think we know what's best for these young people, but I'm not sure how many adults are overly familiar with the sexual practises of young people or youth sexual consent culture. And so if we can consult young people in terms of How does this play out for them? Online, or on a Saturday night, or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, we perhaps can have some more relevant conversations with skills-based, solution-focused outcomes that, you know, really are increasing their health and legal literacy.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And I don't understand you to be saying they are designing lesson plans, for example.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

No, not necessarily. I think they should be consulted around case studies. I think young people have a far more diverse notion of people, so they can have a look to make sure that it actually speaks to, you know, the young people in the classroom. It speaks to diverse experiences, disabilities, cultural backgrounds, relationship types, genders. They can make sure that everyone's reflected in the education. I think that's where we can certainly consult them to.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Now, based on what young people are telling you and your experience otherwise, you have touched on this already, but who should be teaching these topics? And I really am thinking about internal versus external providers in a school.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Okay, so setting aside my gold standard, that we have a stand-alone teacher who specialises in this, like we have a maths teacher, a geography teacher.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So with this, I'll pick you up, I'll pick up that, so this gold standard would be a stand-alone curriculum taught by a specialist teacher or teachers in a school?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely yes, in my opinion. Without that model, what best practice tells us is that it is the classroom teacher who delivers this education, but the curriculum is developed in collaboration with experts and it is complemented by external specialists. Those external specialists can be from a range of different sexual health, community-based youth services and so it would incorporate perhaps legal services or legal perspectives, perhaps an external sexual health provider, perhaps someone visiting from the local rape and sexual assault centre, it might be someone from a local mental health program that has sort of like a queer support or queer drop-in centre. So absolutely, the classroom teacher, the evidence base says, is best placed to be delivering this education with adequate and appropriate training. It's complemented by collaboration with community-based services and complemented by external sexual health specialists as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So why is it, and if you can explain in a sort of high level or brief way, but why is it best practice that the classroom teacher is teaching it?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I mean to be perfectly honest and to my knowledge not many other models have been rigorously evaluated and so I think it's partly opportunistic but I think it's about the fact that the teacher does have an ongoing relationship with those students and so if they are to start having conversations about online pornography, about sexual health and safety, misogyny, sexual violence prevention etc etc, there is that pre-existing rapport ideally and so students are more likely to feel comfortable receiving or listening to that information from someone with whom they have existing rapport, comfort and hopefully respect for.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then you've talked about training, so can you tell us about the importance of that training in delivering this type of education?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yeah, there's so much I'd like to say here, but I think to be brief it's obviously a highly nuanced area of learning. It needs to be skills based. We need someone who is very well trained in trauma informed practise. We need someone who's been thoroughly trained in responding to disclosures of sexual abuse, sexual assault, image based sexual abuse. We need someone who is trained on how we very sensitively have conversations about online misogyny so that we are managing the emotional intensities of the classroom and we have to make sure that we have teachers who are very well trained in creating a safe space for every single student in that classroom. In addition to, and that's just I guess about practise, in addition to that I think we need very specific, very comprehensive training in the subject matter itself.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And what are the risks, what can go wrong if teachers are not properly trained?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

If teachers are not properly trained, they can potentially re-traumatise young people in their classroom. They can also lose the attention of young people before the conversation's even began and that can be, I think, one of the greatest risks, that we've lost them before we've actually managed to impart any of this education or information.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Are there any themes in what young people are saying to you about who should be teaching?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Certainly, the work I did for the Department for Education two years ago, we spoke with young people from around South Australia, so in different contexts, and many of them said

they didn't mind about the gender of the teacher, they just cared that the teacher felt really passionately about the subject matter, that the teacher genuinely cared about their health and safety, that the teacher was non-judgmental, approachable, that the teacher was comfortable and enthusiastic, and so they said they could tell within the first sort of three minutes of the lesson how much they might get out of that depending on the teacher's openness and willingness. And again, that's why I think, and I probably didn't say it, in terms of teacher training, there has to be rigorous training there around identifying and managing unconscious biases. And I said before, there needs to be that clear distinction between the values of the teacher and the health and safety needs of the learners to make sure that a teacher's own values are not impacting the nature of the content they're delivering to students because, you know, teachers are human beings. So they can inadvertently affirm gender practices or gendered practices, stereotypes. They can centre heterosexuality. They can speak only about gender in terms of a binary. They can be staunchly pro-life. You know, there's a number of things that have been going on. So teachers are humans, and I think training needs to address how we manage some of that as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Are students saying anything about peer education or even that sort of help from external providers type of education that you spoke about?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes, so students certainly say that the more voices they hear the same message from, the more likely it is that they'll take it more seriously and it sort of tends to add weight, which is not at all to detract from their class teacher, but I do think that they like to hear the same message from various avenues. Students do seem to have a preference for peer education, which is a bit of a double-edged sword, I think, because we have to make sure the peer educators are also trauma-informed and able to adequately and safely deliver education, but some students spoke about models where the Year 12 students can work with the Year 8 students and the Year 11 students can work with the Year 7 students and are there ways where older students can role model gender equality, gender equitable attitudes to the younger students in incidental or perhaps more targeted initiatives within the school environment itself.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And what about styles of teaching, teaching techniques, what works best and what are the students saying that they think works best?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

That was a learning lesson for me, no more PowerPoint presentations, they just really want it to be interactive, they want it to be discussion focused, they are desperate to hear from each other and that's what I've come to learn. I think that obviously they need to learn all of those very objective pieces of information around health and legal literacy, that critical media literacy and they want to know, well what do you, don't just give us a hypothetical situation and ask us what we do, tell us how can we support a friend who discloses sexual assault to us? Where can we refer them to? Who can we call? What's the nearest service? What's the legislation here? What are our rights? What are our responsibilities? So they want the practical stuff. But they want lessons that are interactive and that are using a number of different techniques. They want the anonymous question box. They want quizzes. They want small group discussions. They want scenarios, case studies, clips from Netflix. They want some YouTube videos. They want texts, poetry. They want a whole array of different ways that they can explore the same kinds of issues.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And a safe learning environment, we've heard that expression used, that must be

important?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

It is important and I think that again that speaks to teacher training. So that's all about how the teacher creates that safety container at the very beginning of that lesson, how that safety container is maintained and how it is revisited before lesson two begins.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And a student saying anything about, sorry back up a step, you've talked about practical advice, what happens if this happens or that happens. What if that's delivered in a way that's suggesting they're going to get in trouble, there's fear involved in the learning, how does that resonate?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I hear this all the time, yes students are really sick to death I think of the fear tactics, of the scare tactics, you know so I see it all the time in terms of you must not because if you do terrible things will happen, so and what I know is that if we take that approach we're reducing our young people's chances or likelihood of actually coming to us to ask for help and not just if but when something goes wrong and I see that also in the space of image-based abuse, image-based sexual abuse, if we're banging on about a digital footprint and you develop something or you publish something that could ruin your job prospects, it could shame your family, it could ruin your life before it's even begun, when and if that nude is either leaked or it is synthetically produced, I guess that really contributes to high levels of psychological distress and it really reduces the likelihood of help-seeking. so that you must not, or else, we know works against all the help-seeking messages and skills that we are trying to teach them.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

What about styles of teaching and teaching techniques in relation to boys specifically?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

This is hotly debated at the moment and there's more and more literature surfacing that is looking at, as I said before, the emotional sensitivities of conversations about online misogyny in the Andrew Tate's of the world. So really well-meaning teachers who are trying to illustrate to students the problematic attitudes that are being espoused, like online misogyny influences like him, without realising that perhaps some of the other messages are speaking to adolescent males for whatever reasons and so we seem to be closing down these conversations rather than opening them up. And this is not across the board, of course there are some brilliant teachers out there who are doing this very, very, very effectively. But again, I think that requires training. I think there are some particularly tricky and nuanced and complex conversations that we need to have and if we're not having them well, we're closing them down. And I think we can be cementing people's attitudes in this space that obviously aren't working towards a more gender equitable society.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

We've heard a bit about boys, adolescent males, being treated like perpetrators, I think is the expression that's used, and that then not being an effective way of educating.

**Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can you explain?

**Tessa Opie:**

Just from a lot of the focus groups that I've done with adolescent males, they talk about being made to feel like potential predators and perpetrators, how it's a very unbending environment for them, they don't want to be a part of that conversation. They talk about terms that put them off almost instantaneously, terms like toxic masculinity. And so, again, it

speaks to teacher training. We have to make sure that we are approaching these conversations in ways that invite every single child in that classroom to be part of that conversation. I think there are ways of highlighting and talking about and exploring online misogyny, but I think we have to do that in quite a crafty kind of way.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

You mentioned before you might lose kids before you've even started teaching, is that what might happen in that space?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

very much so and we hear about that and we see it all the time. And I'm not just speaking about adolescent males, I'm speaking about young people of all genders. I think we have to make sure that we are practising expansively, that we are speaking to the young people who might identify as gender diverse, who might identify as asexual, who might whatever. Expansive practice again speaks to teacher training and that building a safe classroom for all is an incredible skill.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And what about, do you have a view, or do young people have a view about separating genders for educating in this space?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

The evidence speaks staunchly against that. We need to be normalising these conversations for all of us as a community. We should be having these conversations irrespective of our gender. People without uteruses should be learning about periods. Everyone should be a part of every conversation. Everyone should be hearing about pleasure. Everyone should be hearing about sexism and misogyny. We hear sometimes in individual school context that maybe there's a bunch of year 9 girls who don't want to be a part of this conversation with some of their classmates. This is just an example. So if, again, because we're consulting young people and we want to have that child focus, how would you like to learn about this? Well actually we don't want to learn about it altogether. Be that the case, the evidence suggests that you would actually, rather than have two groups, the boys group and the girls group, you'd actually have three groups. And you'd have a mostly boys group, a mostly girls group and a mixed gender group. And students can self-assign.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Changing topics slightly, when should this education be taught and I know we've talked about a range of subjects here, but can you speak generally to when it should start with young people?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

As early as possible. Yep, I agree with the Department for Education.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and so teaching these different topics in an age-appropriate way?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely. And I would argue, you know, building on from this morning's conversation, you know, and the comment about students that are saying, look, we want to learn about this stuff. We want to learn about it younger. I mean, I hear that too. Younger in more detail, students saying to me, let's tackle this head on. And I think that we can be explicit without being age inappropriate and without being, yeah, without being inappropriate. I think explicit doesn't necessarily mean sexually explicit. it, it means really clear on what we're trying to teach these people.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

In a moment, I'll come to perhaps some examples of how that might be done in an age-appropriate way. What about when the education might finish in terms of schooling?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Year 12, absolutely, year 11 and year 12, absolutely, because remember it would be a dedicated subject, its own stand alone.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

In your gold standard world.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

That's right

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And it probably goes without saying, but what's the importance of teaching right through to ... ..

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Well I just always find it interesting that we stop in year 10 and then we have the most sexually active students in years 11 and 12. We also have students who are drinking, taking recreational drugs, not all students clearly, but some who might be experimenting, you know engaging in sexual activity, so I think those conversations should absolutely be having, being had with 11s and 12s as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

We've heard this morning about different education sectors having different rules, I guess, or approaches to parents being able to opt their children out of some of these subjects, or all of them. Do you have anything to say about that?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I think that there has to be an opt-out element if we're taking, I guess, a trauma-informed approach, but I just wonder what the age can and should be. Given the work I do with young people, and certainly perhaps in diverse contexts, a lot of young people don't want to be blocked from accessing this education, and their argument is we're all living in the same world online, we're attending the same parties, we're, you know, in terms of, you know, each school, each cohort. And so we all want access to this education. I wonder if, you know, we talk about in South Australia, the legal age of consent is 17, but it's legally okay for 16-year-olds to be engaging in consensual sexual activity. I mean, is there some kind of system where we rely on parental consent, I don't know, up to the age of 15? And then thereafter, if a student, if that student in a year perhaps 10, 11 or 12, once topped out, it's actually not a decision for the parents to be making, particularly if they are legally of age to be engaging in sexual activity. It might be, we might defer to the student. Do they feel comfortable attending this lesson? I don't know if I'm making, if I'm being clear, but yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Absolutely. You mentioned we need to have an opt-out option to be trauma-informed. Can you elaborate on what you mean by that a bit more?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I think, so, just to be really brief, a trauma-informed approach is not about going, okay, we're going to be really sensitive today with that child and that child and that child because we're aware of that, those children's backgrounds, they've experienced something. Trauma-informed approach is a number one, not ever assuming to know what any kind of traumatic event, what the impact that might have had on any particular student, and instead they're just assuming that every child sitting in front of you may have potentially experienced something that they have perceived to be traumatic. Being child-focused, being trauma-informed, is understanding and acknowledging and accepting that if a student comes to you and says, today doesn't feel like the right day for me to be engaging in this lesson, we trust that they know what's best for them. And they can opt out. We don't need to know why. We need them to know that we can support them, if that's what they'd like to do, maybe not today, maybe tomorrow, maybe next month. We should also be playing a very active role in being the conduit between that student and external service providers beyond the school

gates, because for many students school might not be a safe place to access help.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So we're acknowledging in there that students may disclose these type of issues.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and the teachers and the schools need to be equipped to deal with that.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely. And I think that's another whole area that needs to be really critically looked at.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Are you able to say anything about the level of parent carer support for this type of education in general?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I can speak to some research that was published by Curtin University this year, so Jackie Hendricks and her colleagues, I think they were keen to address a very, I guess a minority of parents and carers, with very loud voices, that perpetuate this idea that parents don't support the delivery of relationships and sexuality education in schools. And so they surveyed thousands of parents across all jurisdictions in Australia, across government-independent Catholic schools from diverse cultural backgrounds and religious backgrounds, diverse voting preferences, diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and what they actually found was that 90 % of Australian parents who engaged in this research emphatically endorsed the provision of relationships and sexuality education in schools around the country.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I've just thought of something else that I meant to ask you earlier, I'm sorry. In your gold standard ideal world with a specialist teacher and a specialist topic. We heard this morning about whole school education and delivering a message, not just within one subject. Have you got anything to say about that, the importance of that?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely, and that's another capacity in which I work with schools in terms of, you know, yes, I'm talking about gold standards, it's a stand alone subject, but actually when I do whole staff professional development workshops, it's about getting every single teacher there, irrespective of their subject matter, to work out how they can embed or thread gender equality throughout their program area. So it might be the year five teacher who's teaching maths one day and saying, hey kids, do you find this strange? Because I've had teachers before say, oh what, so you want me to rewrite the whole maths textbook? No, I don't. But say to the kids, have you found it weird that every time we do, you know, sums in this, in this, from this maths book, it's always Roger who's got the hammers and Betty who's got the cupcakes. Today, Betty can have the cupcakes and, no, Betty can have the hammers, Roger can have the cupcakes. And, you know, looking at, you know, in science, can we look at all the unsung female scientists who haven't made the history books? Can we include texts like Honeybee? Can we, you know, if we look at legal studies, let's have a, let's have a critical analysis of the effectiveness of Affirmative Consent legislation. So the work I do with these teachers so that it's not just, if we were to have the gold standard, your RSE teacher, it doesn't 100 % fall within their lessons, it is absolutely a whole school approach that's threaded throughout every single subject area and every teacher has to play a role in threading those messages through.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And with, I assume, adequate training, adequate support to deliver those kind of messages?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Absolutely.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can we move to content now?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And I am sure that if I said, what's best practice or what do young people want to be taught, you could probably talk for hours about the subjects that could be included. So perhaps if we can just focus on a few examples, what are young people saying they need to be taught? What are they saying they should be taught in those subjects to help keep them safe? If I take consent, which is a big topic that I hear a lot about, what are you hearing about the teaching of consent to young people?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

This is sort of like my passion area. So I'm hearing lots of things. I'm hearing about teachers who do it so incredibly well and students who adore their teachers and talk about their teacher giving them life-saving education. I hear some students who feel like it's missing the mark. So what we know is that often, or the students will tell us, and the research actually confirms this Australian-based research, students are very good at telling teachers what they think they want to hear. So the teacher will say, what's consent? The students will say, well, consent's a verbal enthusiastic yes. And the teacher goes, fabulous, we've done that really well. The problem with that is that students can tell us that consent is a verbal enthusiastic yes, which is not at all how I define it. And yet we know from Australian-based research, looking at young people and sexual practices, that the sexual practices of young Australians are wildly nonverbal. So students being able to tell us that consent's an enthusiastic yes in no way translates or transfers to their real world sexual experiences online or offline. So they want to talk in far more detail about consent and how it might apply better to their contexts. So number one, let's not talk about it being verbal when they're not being verbal. Number two, I work with a lot of young people who find this concept of permission giving or agreement incredibly confusing, which is difficult because in the Australian curriculum it is about seeking, giving and denying consent. And I think what I want to, I have to be brief, but I guess what I'm trying to speak to here is that I'm always trying to be devil's advocate in focus groups to really kind of dig deep and see how students are interpreting this education. And so when I'm working with students and I talk to them about, you know, if consent is agreement, what does that mean? And we talk about, for example, the different ways that you can get someone to say yes. And I use an analogy of an eight-year-old who wants an ice cream. Mum, can I have an ice cream? Not today. Please? Not today. But it's my favourite ice cream shop. Not today. You promised me you'd not today. Well, my other parent would get me one. They probably would. Not today. I promised I'd go home and clean my room. Not today. I promised I won't go on the iPad for the rest of the year. Not today. And eventually the parent might say, okay, fine, I'll get you an ice cream. The child says, yes. Did they say yes? Yep. Eventually. Did they consent? Well, yeah, they said yes. So I think young people are really struggling with this conceptualisation that consent is agreement. Number one, we can try all different tactics to get the person to say yes, but number two, there's this assumption with agreement that this is occurring in the way we're teaching it between two social equals and the sexual practices of our young people are not predicated on this sense of equality at all. We have generally in a heterosexual context, the guy in I guess a bit more of a powerful position who is expected to instigate or initiate the sexual activity and we tend to have the girl in that gatekeeping role. The consent lays with her. So talking about consent as agreement between two

equals, that doesn't translate either. That's not working for our young people.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Do you have suggestions about how, given the example of the ice cream, do you have suggestions about how it can be taught in a meaningful way?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

And so when we are working with young people, we talk very much about the fact that consent's also a verb. And so it's a skill, it's something you practise. So we talk about the fact that consent cannot possibly be conceptualised as this box that you tick before you get busy getting sexually active. It's actually inherently threaded throughout the entire sexual experience itself. So it's this mutually collaborative, mutually participatory experience between two people. You can't disentangle it from the sexual activity itself. And so we talk about, okay, you know, if consent is a verb, if it's something you practise, we kind of then take it down the path of, well, then what skills do you need to do consent well? And we talk about consent as sexual intelligence, as, you know, you might have seen something a thousand times online that doesn't necessarily mean you know how to do it well or safely, or in a way that prioritises mutual safety, mutual pleasure, mutual consent.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

We talked before about age appropriate teaching, can you give an example of how you might start teaching consent at a young age?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Um, yeah, I was thinking about this, so, you mean sort of like concrete examples?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

You talk to us about how you would teach a year five student.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

So an activity that we would do with Year 5 students, for example, is get them into pairs and we would say, person A, person B, person A, person B, and person A has \$5 and person B has 30 seconds and they can use whatever strategies they like to convince person A to hand over their money and they have a really fabulous time. And then we go around the classroom and say, who was successful in getting their \$5 from their partner? Okay, great, what strategies did you use? And the students, you know, the strategies are as diverse as the young people are creative but we label them as we go in terms of emotional manipulation or we talk about threats to safety or we talk about guilt tripping, we talk about a whole number of things. And the conversation can progress to, so is this consent? And some of the Year 5s might be like, well, yeah, they handed it over, like I wasn't exactly holding a gun to their head. And maybe the other half of the Year 5 students are saying, mmm, don't think so, not really. And so talking about the fact that actually consent's got to be fairly practised. So the minute we apply any pressure, no matter how good our strategy might have been, how effective, the minute we apply any pressure, consent's actually ruined. You know, we've ruined that. So then they can practise a response that reassures their partner that when the partner says, no, I'm not handing over my money, they can practise responses that, you know, show their partner that they're respecting their boundary and their decision. We talk about what conditions make it not just okay but truly fabulous for two people to hold hands or kiss, and Year 5 students can do that, they can do that, they can brainstorm and they can come up with when both people want to, when it feels good for both people and when no one feels forced or pressured. We can talk about respecting boundaries with Year 5, Year 6, Year 7 students, they can get into pairs, they can ask whether they can take a step towards each other, which is one of my most favourite activities of all time, then the pair says stop, you're quite close enough, they then reverse that and the other person has a turn, and what do we notice? Well we notice that everyone's got different size personal bubbles and you know, how does it feel to say stop

and have your partner respect that? Yeah, I feel like I can trust them, I'd feel safe with them, I'd feel safe to be alone with them, you know, they respect me. What would it feel like if you said stop but they kept steamrolling towards you? Well, it would feel unsafe, but really teasing that out. And so we kind of then can progress that conversation to, do you think your partner might have said yes to you but they actually really wanted you to stop? And you know, some invariably there'll be someone there sort of saying yeah, and well I said, look, do you think sometimes in life people do say yes to things when actually they'd really like to say no? Yeah, and then there's all sorts of examples. My brother was once dared to eat a chilli and he didn't want to, but he said yes. You know, I was once dared to go jetty jumping and I'm terrified of sharks or heights, but I did it. So we can come up with all of these fabulous examples and go, yeah, great. There's the inside voice and the outside voice. What could we do if we thought someone was saying yes to something, but deep down they really wanted to say no? And year fives, year six, year seven students can come up with the most concrete strategies. You could pretend that you changed your mind. You could reassure them that it's okay if they really don't want to. You can then just say, look, don't worry about it, and suggest a different activity instead. Kids can do this. And then we can say to them, right, how might this conversation translate to kissing or holding hands or other sexual activity? And then I like to show a Bluey episode called Dance Mode to just talk about inside voice and outside voice.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And another topic that we hear a lot about is healthy, unhealthy relationships. Is that something that is important to be teaching as part of this?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes, I think that all of us, I think people of all ages, need a much better idea about what is considered healthy, but particularly what's considered unhealthy as opposed to abusive. Yes, the education should not stop in schools. Yes, we need to be far more explicit, I think, in that area as well, and I think that sexual violence, certainly sexual violence prevention, certainly falls under that. I mean, obviously, you know, consent does as well. Yes, the online environment.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

What are young people saying about, well obviously we spoke at the beginning of the evidence about how the online environment is affecting this area so much in recent times, what are young people saying they want to learn about in relation to the online environment in this space?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

So, sextortion has been a big conversation recently and I think if we look at the data and we see that 12 to 15 year old boys are most at risk, I mean everyone should be learning about sextortion, but I think those conversations need to be happening a lot earlier, really interactive, you know, critical thinking kind of activities showing, you know, how groomers target young people, how those conversations progress, getting young people to brainstorm or what are like some strategies that I could use to be an online detective. So being really clear that if someone is asking you if someone else uses your device, if there's anyone else in the room, whether they have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, if they start talk to you about sexual activity like kissing or anything else, you know, identifying all of these red flags. But also it's that help-seeking stuff as well. It's talking about collecting evidence, it's talking about where can you go and it's making sure we do not have those sort of like victim-blaming attitudes as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

We have heard about education in recent time around strangulation and the importance of that. Can you explain a little bit about that?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

So the University of Melbourne published some data this year showing us that I think it was 57 % of Australians aged between 18 and 35 have experienced sexual strangulation and not all of that was consensual. And I think 51 % of participants in this study, in that same age group obviously, said that they had strangled a partner during sexual activity or sexual intercourse I think more specifically. And so I have certainly been working with Year 12 students, whereby I've taken parts, I have sort of taken excerpts of that research into the classroom. Obviously, I've given them the heads up in terms of, you know, the different conversations we'll be having that day. But getting them to look critically at that data and then have small group discussions that really probe what social factors are influencing this, How do we feel about this, you know, I guess getting young people to explore the data because I think that can be a way that depersonalises some of these conversations, highlights the prevalence, gets them to think about the different social factors, perhaps the influence of online pornography, what is, you know, in the cases where that sexual strangulation was non-consensual, what's preventing people from speaking up in those moments.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

You've mentioned online pornography and what young people are seeing, how is that and how is the prevalence of online pornography impacting the behaviours of children and young people?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I mean yes, I mean obviously online porn is having a significant impact on many young people's expectations around sexual activity, ideas around gendered relations, power dynamics, dominance, submission, so of course porn literacy, which I guess is a subsection of media literacy more broadly, has to be prioritised because you know if a young person starts watching online pornography at the age of 10 and yet their first real world sexual experience is until the age of 17 or 18, there's quite a bit of porn consumption perhaps that's happened throughout that 7 or 8 years. So I think there's two parts to porn literacy that are vitally important. One is obviously that critical analysis of how it might be misrepresentative of mutually safe, mutually consenting, mutually pleasurable sexual activity in the real world. But I think perhaps more importantly, what is online pornography missing that is actually essential to mutually pleasurable, mutually safe, mutually consenting sexual activity in the real world, because we don't know what we don't know, we only know what we have been exposed to. So it's one thing to critique what we've been exposed to, it's another thing to think, what does it not show us that's so vital to me developing the skills I need to when I'm ready one day, if I want to, share my sexuality really well and really safely with someone else.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And is there a way, or is the online environment addressed to young, with young people in this education? I mean, like the year five level in mind?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I certainly will. I'm talking about online misogyny, you know, with year 5, year 6, year 7 students. I can't comment for any other programs.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

How are you doing that in a way that's appropriate for those young people?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

So, for example, it could be with really young students talking about what are valid sources of information about puberty, sexual activity, relationships, and looking at government websites, looking at a whole raft of age-appropriate ways of accessing online information. It could be asking, you know, what's some less helpful ways of finding out some information

about this? That conversation sort of organically, again, this speaks to teacher training, so that conversation can go in all sorts of directions, so you want to be prepared for that. But I think it's also about highlighting creepy, stalker, grooming behaviour online, particularly if we're talking about sextortion. I think it's about being really clear, what are the characteristics of online misogyny influences, letting them know that they're using some really controversial beliefs to build this huge following. And sort of talking about, you know, let's think about how different people, giving young people different character cards and looking at some headlines that, you know, online social influencers have published. Well, how might your character feel about that statement? How might your character feel about that statement? So I think there's different ways that we can have these conversations where we're really starting to generate that awareness. There was something else I was going to say about that, but I've lost it, sorry.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Another topic that I just wanted to ask you about, and I suspect that you've addressed this in talking about some of the other topics, is sexual violence perpetration and some of the risk factors.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yeah, I talk about this a lot in focus groups with students and we certainly embed it into our education. I firmly believe that if young people don't know what those more peer-related individual-level risk factors for sexual violence perpetration are, quite clearly they can't identify in self or others. And so an awareness like many things in life is protective. So if we are talking quite explicitly and we're, as students say, like let's have this conversation head-on, And we're doing it in ways that are engaging, that are safe, that don't make students feel like potential predators and perpetrators themselves. We can have really beneficial conversations about, okay, so exposure to violent online pornography, hyper-masculinity, peer pressure to be sexually active, peer approval of coerced sexual activity. If we don't actually let young people know that these are risk factors, individual level risk factors or peer-related risk factors, how can they possibly link that to sexual violence in the real world or the broader context within which sexual violence occurs?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And gender equality, to pick one last topic, is that something that young people are talking to you about?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes, yes, and they want to talk about more, but they want to talk about it in creative ways. They don't want to talk about it in ways where they glaze over before the lessons even began. Gender equality, unfortunately for a staunch feminist like myself, has become a very unsexy term. So, yeah, I think we have to be clever about that, too, and I think we need to talk about gender equality in relation to sport, the boardroom, the bedroom. They're quite happy to have a conversation about gender equality in the bedroom, surprisingly enough, but they're different kind of contexts there.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you, Dr Opie. I have no further questions, Commissioner.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you. I think you've pre-empted all of mine, although I'm still reverberating from the notion that gender equality is no longer a sexy term.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I'm sorry to break the news.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

I'm questioning my life's work as we speak. Did you utilise the terminology sexual intelligence? Was that something you said?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

Yes, I certainly did not coin that, but I certainly do talk about it with Year 11 and Year 12 students. Yes, I don't know where to look. Sorry, Commissioner.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

That is, you're looking in the right place, but feel free to look on the screen and forgive me for not being in front of you. But so you didn't coin it, but it's a term that is increasingly universally understood in your area of work.

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

I'm not sure about relationships and sexuality education per se, but certainly in the broader sexological scholarship it is a term that is used, yes.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

I'm interested about the workforce. You've talked about the gold standard and obviously what that entails in terms of, you know, a pipeline of workers and obviously expertly trained ones. I mean, how many people are in your field currently and, you know, what kind of standards are applied to the work that you're doing, if any?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

So it's very diverse around Australia. So we're working across Australia and New Zealand. There are a number of external providers when it comes to relationships and sexuality education. It's become increasingly popular or an increasingly busier space since consent education was mandated at the beginning of 2023. There is no accreditation, formal national accreditation process. So there are people going into schools with various qualifications, so they might have postgraduate qualifications in sexology, they might be teachers, they might be sexual health nurses, they might be young people who are peer educators who may have done a 2, 3, 4, 5 day course. So long story short, there is no national standard in this space.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

And I think swirling back to where I started, quite seriously, allowing for all the intersecting issues to which you refer, how important is gender equality as a basis for so much of this work?

**Dr Tessa Opie:**

It is the most important conversation or the most important foundation that underpins every single conversation within relationships and sexuality education. You know, gender and power specifically. Who has it? Why do they have it? What do they do with it? We can't have relationships and sexuality education. That is not founded within a framework of gender equality.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you for that. I have no further questions.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

No, Commissioner, I'd ask the witness be excused.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you for your testimony today, Doctor, and you're free to go.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. Thanks. And Commissioner, that brings us to the lunchtime break.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Indeed, we will adjourn and reconvene at two o'clock Central Standard Time. Thank you everyone.

**Witness:**

**Sara Porzio, Principal, Fregon Area School**

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Welcome back to the Royal Commission on Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. This is the stage three of our public hearings and the topic for today is education, generally, but particularly primary prevention in education settings. I hand over to Counsel Assisting, Ms Orr, to continue and introduce our next set of witnesses.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you, Commissioner. The next witness is Ms Sara Porzio with ladies from the Kungka Ninti program at the Fregon Anangu School. As I explained in my opening this morning, the way in which this evidence will be presented is likely to be slightly different from that which is traditional for a Royal Commission. We invited this team to tell us how they wished to give evidence and so Ms Porzio will give evidence and will be accompanied by members of the team. They didn't wish to have an interpreter for this session. So with that being said, I call Sara Porzio. We'll just get you to take an oath.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

Do you swear that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Say, I swear.

**Sara Porzio:**

I swear.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

And can you please state your full name?

**Sara Porzio:**

My name is Sara Valerie Porzio.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. Ms Porzio, can you see and hear me okay?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

You are the principal at the Fregon Area School and who is in the room with you or who is the group in the room with you?

**Sara Porzio:**

With me, that some of the members of the Anangu educators and coordinators and support staff, some of the members of the Kungka Ninti team, which is our well-being and sex ed program here at Fregon Area School.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Before I ask you about that program, can you explain where Fregon is?

**Sara Porzio:**

It is in the northern part of South Australia. So we are 1,400 kilometres from Adelaide. We are on Anangu land. And we are part of a partnership of 10 schools across 800 kilometres. And we have 250 people living in Fregon. And 99.9 % of the population is Anangu, except for the service providers, which are the school, the clinic, the shop, the arts centre and the aged care services.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And I want to ask you a bit more about your school. Does that go from - what age do children start at that school?

**Sara Porzio:**

We have a current enrolment of 65 across the from reception to Year 12, and we have 5 in the early years, so in the kindy, and then we have quite a lot of babies as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

How long has the school been there?

**Sara Porzio:**

It started off in the 1960s with one building and an Anangu teacher as well as a whitefella teacher. It was very, you know, learning on country as well as learning how to read and write in English and in their first language. and yeah, so we've been here a long time, and we are actually getting a new school very soon.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And Ms Porzio, how long have you been at the school?

**Sara Porzio:**

I have worked at the school for seven years. I've worked in a range of different roles. I started as a junior primary teacher and then I was in the middle years. Then I worked from Adelaide for one year as a fly in-fly out behaviour support coach for student support services and I worked across three sites on the APY Lands and then I came back here a couple of years ago as a deputy principal and this is my first year as a principal at the school.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I now want to ask you about the Kungka Ninti program which you've mentioned. Can you just provide us with a bit of an overview or an introduction about what that program is?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yeah the program is a well-being sexual health, mental health education program. It follows the Keeping Safe curriculum framework, but it has been extremely contextualised to suit the needs of our community. It is Anangu led, so it's led by female community members of all generations. It has a few different components so one of them is camps on countries, which is a very traditional way to pass on knowledge for Anangu women, for Anangu people in general, but for women especially. So it's a model that's not new, I guess, but it's sort of using that framework of Keep Safe Curriculum and the traditional knowledge and the traditional way of sharing that in in a very contextualised and culturally responsive way, I guess. So that's the first component of the program. The second part is there is the Kungka Ninti room at the school, so it's a women and girls only classroom where we have a weekly session where we address topics such as safe people to talk to in community, community, safety at night, online safety, abuse, who to go to first, drugs, violence and fighting, young marriage and good men, safety when we go out with community, stalking, following, getting clinic check-ups, hygiene, invitations, good and bad, safe people to talk to in community, and then all the general sort of, you know, menstrual cycle, you know, all that kind of topics as well. So it's, we connect with service providers as well to the program, such as the clinic and NPY Women's Council. When it was started in Fregon on eight years ago now. CAMHS was also very involved with us in organising the first camp and the first session.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can you tell us what Kungka Ninti means in English? We're just having some sound difficulties at this end. Could you repeat that, I'm sorry?

**Sara Porzio:**

It means smart and knowledgeable women and young girls.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and I understand that you won a public education award for this program?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And when was that?

**Sara Porzio:**

It was last year.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I just want to ask you a bit about the background to this program and how it was developed. So you've said it teaches the Keeping Safe curriculum which we've been hearing about this morning and I think you said it was developed about 8 years ago. Can you just tell us about the background of how that came about?

**Sara Porzio:**

Thank you.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Sorry, Ms Porzio, I'm just going to stop you there because I'm actually having trouble hearing you. We might just have a two minute break to try and work out the sound at our end, if you just hold.

Thank you, sorry about that. I was asking you about the background to how this program was developed in order to teach the Keeping Safe curriculum in your community, if you could tell us a bit about that.

**Sara Porzio:**

So because of the content of the Keeping Safe curriculum and some of the issues that our context in a community space, we had to adapt the delivery mode, obviously, to be culturally responsive, as well as some of the content to also actually really target and tell the stories of what is really happening on the ground. So, this is why when, eight years ago, myself and another teacher, because we wanted to teach the curriculum, consulted with Anangu teachers, community members, and other service providers, such as, as I said, CAMHS and NPY Women's Council, we realised that we needed to do something different. So I guess it's important to understand that in a remote context, and it's okay for me to talk a bit of a hard story here?

There are a lot of complexities in our community. There are a lot of men that have acquired brain injuries due to petrol sniffing, so this is quite a lot of, and theft behaviours, there's overcrowding, a lot of women and young girls have been hurt. There is a lot of intergenerational trauma, obviously, and there's a lot of mental health issues. So, you know, I guess the Keep Safe Curriculum framework is quite broad in the way it addresses these issues, but not necessarily in the context of such reality. So we definitely had to be sensitive in that space. One thing that we do very differently is the delivery mode. So all those hard stories, things about grooming, about sexual abuse, disclosure, etc., are done through paintings and through stories. So we have a few here on the table. I don't know if you can see. So this is one, for example, this one is about grooming. We have another one around disclosure. And those are used by Anangu educators and family members. They speak in language to the girls around the fire, on the country, and that's how we address those stories. So I think what makes this program really successful and everyone is engaged here and very proud of it is because it's contextualised as much as we possibly can and it's very Anangu-led and all the resources are developed by Anangu ladies and in language.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. So, I think you've explained that it needed to be adapted with kind of two things in mind. One is the context that you're delivering it in and the circumstances and one is the way that it was being taught adapted to that culture. Can you tell us a bit more about how it's taught with those differences in mind and with that cultural appropriateness? You've mentioned the painting, how about the involvement of the rest of the community?

**Sara Porzio:**

And when we were on camp, virtually all the female community members were present from grandmothers, to aunties, to sisters, to the young girls, as well as all the teachers and female service providers, and the same way those weekly sessions, the Kungka Ninti room is open to all women in the community. So I guess that intergenerational way of teaching but it's through all the women in the family. So that's one way that is different.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Is that a traditional way of, is that a culturally appropriate way of teaching in that community?

**Sara Porzio:**

.. all together going on country and out bush and telling each other the stories. So that's a very old way of learning and teaching. So yes, that's definitely, yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I'll just go back a step. You talked about the room and I think you said there's a weekly session. Is that like a sort of formal, or not formal, but is that a set session or lesson every week?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yeah, so it's on one hour on Wednesday afternoons, and it is really open to all community women to talk about different stories, and we go through what's most relevant at this time. So, for example, it's been footy season that the ladies are really keen to talk to the young girls about safety, moving from community to community, walking around at night time. If there's some issues around social media in community, well, that's what we will address it. Again, it's contextualised to the needs of the community at this time. We don't follow the Keep Safe curriculum in any linear pattern. We just go with whatever is the most needed at the time in that weekly session, keeping in mind that we want to address as many topics as possible. And I guess when we go out on country, the topics that are addressed are often quite similar, so we do talk about the harder stories, about sexual abuse exposure, all these kinds of things, as well as sexual health, puberty, contraception, all these kind of things.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And are they run so many times a year?

**Sara Porzio:**

The camps? We aim to have two a year. Last year we had three. So, yeah, it just depends, again, on what's happening, on needing to respond to what's happening. It's very hard to do a camp when it's 40 degrees and upward. We tend to do them in Term 2 and 3, this camp.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And who goes on those camps.

**Sara Porzio:**

So the female teachers, staff, or female Anangu educators, elders, community members, as I said, pretty much virtually all, most women in community. I think it was last year there was no women left in the community when all the women were at the camp, across all ages.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then, you mentioned the room where the classes are held. Is that, I think you said it was a well-being room as well. Is that open more generally for that purpose?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yes, the women might come in ... as a safe space. And there's lots of hygiene products and things, resources, self-regulation resources, books etc. for women to engage with. So yes, it's also a well-being space and it's open to women.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And going back to the way that it's taught, if I can just ask you a few more things about that, is it correct that it's quite a practical, hands-on approach? So you've mentioned the telling stories, but is that also?

**Sara Porzio:**

Again, it is very hands-on visual way of teaching. So it's not, you know, via books or PowerPoint. If we talk about contraception, we will show the girls how things are used. If we talk about the spread of STIs, for example, it's all about visualising it. Yeah, everything is quite hands-on and visual because we try and limit the use of complex terminology. I guess

as a cohort, we have English as an additional language, so it's either first language as a preferred method or very hands-on visual way of teaching and learning

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then you also mentioned storytelling and the use of paintings. And you've got some paintings there. Is anyone able to talk us through those paintings that you've got and what they mean? Or are you able to? Sorry Miss Porzio, I think you're going to have to face the screen when you talk to us.

**Sara Porzio:**

I will, sorry.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

No, that's okay.

**Sara Porzio:**

Sorry I just had to check with the ladies. This is all in language. (showing a painting) so this one is a story about disclosure of student to a teacher, and the process of mandatory notification, so it tells the story of kids telling a story to their teacher, something that's happened to them that wasn't safe, And then it's the process of the teacher for working with the student and the family to support them through it. And all the worries that the family and the student may have. So removal of children by child protection, wellbeing issues, so yeah, this is one story.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I think you said grooming maybe?

**Sara Porzio:**

So this one is about having a man or maybe a distant family member that is being nice to us, giving us lollies, maybe cool drinks, and saying come for a ride in my car, and then giving a lot of food to a young girl, and it's a cautionary tale that that person may not have good intention and then if something happens, if they do abuse you, what are the things that need to happen. But it's not so much, it's just a story of that, of that can happen. This is something that may have happened to you or that can happen, that this person looks like they have good intentions but then in the end what they will do is to try and assault you, and then what you can do about it, who are some of the people that you can... Yeah, and the perception that the kid, well it's a concept of grooming, that the kid will think, oh he's a good man, he's a good person because he's given me all these good things so now I have to do what he's telling me to do. So yeah, I mean this is grooming just in an Anangu responsive way.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you and that painting at the back of the room is that the Kungka Ninti team or program?

**Sara Porzio:**

It is as collaborative painting that was done with the Anangu educators, the teachers, and it tells the story of the ladies, the young girls at the centre, and they're surrounded by, you know, all that, yeah, working together.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Working together, did you say?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yeah, yeah, so that becomes their concept of working together. All the teachers and family members and everyone that is around them to work together to make the Kungka, the girls, Ninti, knowledgeable and strong.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. I want to ask you about the success of the program, obviously you won a public education award for it, but how do you measure success as a teacher and in your

community? What do you see as products of the program?

**Sara Porzio:**

So our number one is the engagement that we have. I think everyone shows up and that's a way to know that people are invested in it. Having those ladies here being very brave and talking to you guys is definitely showing that it's having an impact. I think there's no shame now talking about very hard topics when we are in that environment of Kungka Ninti.

There's a lot more speaking up. And it's just that network of ladies and women who know what to do and where to go if there are issues or concerns. And obviously it's a work in progress. It's something that will take a while. We're very much looking at establishing something for fellas like that. And there's been a lot of talk and a lot of emerging young fellas leaders that want to start that conversation with males as well. And we think that's a critical point for change. But I think, yeah, there's just a lot of narrative evidence, a lot of stories I could tell that show that it's had a great impact. And I guess, you know, as I said, when last year the camp had all the women and community there, it's a great, yeah, it shows. The other thing is accessing other services. We've seen that. Ladies have been talking to NPY Women's Council, going to the clinic, talking to SAPOL DV unit, there's more speaking up. Anything else, ladies?

Yeah, trust, yeah, that's right. Developing that trust, that, you know, those are the stories that are out there. Those are, you know, the hard things that are there, but if you trust, you know, that we can work together towards something better.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And I understand that other schools are seeking you out because of this program, is that correct?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yeah, five other sites and they wanted to have a chat with us around what the program looked like. We had a couple of schools actually sending some of the educators and young girls to one of our camps this year and we've had various meetings with our Anangu educators and other schools to talk about the program. I think across the partnership is something that very much, you know, wanted to do something along those lines, yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. I just wanted to ask you about one more thing. I understand, or the Royal Commission has heard, that you have some social workers at your school to offer some support to the students?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yes. So we have two social workers, a male and a female, who previously worked with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services for over a decade on the lands. They were based here. They had a very strong connection with families across quite a few communities. One of them actually speaks the language and grew up here. very strong community connection, which I think has made the model very strong. I think the idea of having social workers is a really good idea, but it's also people that are connected to the context and are willing to be here full-time, like the teachers are, and it's been good. What do you think about Bobby and Andrew working with us? It's been half a year, and the impact and the outcomes have been incredible at supporting us. I think it's that model of an all services school because whether we want it or not, we are the ones on the ground 40 weeks a year. There are very scarce other services here that actually are on the ground full time. There's a lot of fly-in, fly-out services. So if we don't have those social workers, teachers and principals and support staff are the ones that are filling the gaps for the community needs in that space of family support. So it's been a really good, yeah, it's been a very very good model and I hope we can continue it in the future.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And have you employed those people out of your normal funding, you haven't received any additional funding to do that?

**Sara Porzio:**

(unclear response).

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you Ms Porzio. Commissioner, I have no further questions.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you. Thank you for that fascinating and innovative evidence. Really interesting to see a culturally safe, locally delivered program. Some of the questions I had revolved around what you've just been asked by Counsel Assisting, and that is the issue of resourcing, and also how you measure success. So, I might ask from a different perspective on resourcing, what do you think you still need? What's required, not necessarily simply to scale up or provide that program and for say, five other sites, or indeed for the men to provide similar programs. What would make your lives and this messaging and engagement easier?

**Sara Porzio:**

Yeah, so I guess, yeah, spreading the message would be great. I think getting more resources to focus on the fellas program would be wonderful. And I guess it's that notion of building capacity of people that are on the ground, the locals that are here that are always going to be here, because as service providers, we come in and out. I've been here for a while, but it's not the reality of it. Most educators stay for 18 months or two years. So I guess it's capacity building on the ground, I think. It's Anangu empowering, it's me seeing those ladies, yeah, really strong in their community and really, yeah, really empowered to hold that program and programs like that. So I think it's, yeah, that's the kind of resources we would need, you know, and people committing, I guess, as well for, yeah, for longer periods. I think the fly-in, fly-out model for a lot of service provision is a bit broken in our space. and it leaves us, as the services that are on the ground 24-7, quite vulnerable, and we fill a lot of gaps, which can be, you know, contributing to people leaving so quickly because of the burnout. You know, that it can, yeah. Oh, another thing is, you know, Fregon doesn't have police here. We have two police stations, one in Mimili, one in Ernabella, they're 45 minutes away, at best. And we just had a police station built in Fregon, but somehow it's not going to be manned, and the community are wondering about that. Because why would you build a police station? And I know resourcing are hard, but I guess you could build locals up to become constables, that's another option.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Interesting. So sustainability, capacity building, those issues. And you do feel that there really is an appetite among the men and maybe particularly elders or the young men to provide services?

**Sara Porzio:**

The elders support that too.... I think there's a generation of males that are very keen and want to make a change.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you for that. Apologies that the technology and the sound quality wasn't the best it could be. I think that just emphasises for this Royal Commission how important it is to provide opportunities for people in regional, remote, rural areas, but also we're very conscious of many of the difficulties being compounded in those areas. So please don't think that is lost on us. But we greatly appreciate your sharing the work that you're doing and really appreciate the opportunity to see the artwork as well with such important messaging. So thank you for today. Really appreciate it.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you Commissioner, I'd ask that Ms Porzio and the ladies be excused please.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Absolutely, you are free to go and thank you once again.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and then we'll just have a short break, a five minute break, before the next witness Commissioner.

**Witness:**

**Jake Battifouco, Power Community**

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you, Commissioner. I call Mr Jake Battifouco.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

Do you truly and solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, say I do truly and solemnly affirm.

**Jake Battifouco:**

I do truly and solemnly affirm.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

Thank you, and please state your full name.

**Jake Battifouco:**

Jake Battifouco

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

You're the General Manager at Power Community.

**Jake Battifouco:**

I am.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can you tell us what Power Community is?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yes, so Power Community Limited is the community development arm and not-for-profit charity arm of the Port Adelaide Football Club, so we are an independent foundation set up within the Port Adelaide Football Club to drive societal challenges that young people predominantly face within the community. So we have four key focus areas, which is First Nations, specifically focusing around advancing reconciliation, multicultural, which is using the power of sport to bring people together to celebrate culture and everyone's contributions to Australia. Australian Defence Force which focuses on well-being and resilience outcomes and also a respectful relationships pillar so doing a lot of work in the prevention of violence against women, working with young men around gendered based violence, young women around empowerment and also about to launch a new program which is focused around online safety.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And so within that respectful relationships, primary prevention, you are educating young people.

**Jake Battifouco:**

We are, yep, so predominantly working with Year 10 students in partnership with Centacare, Catholic Community Services and also the Government of South Australia.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So you've mentioned a couple of groups or programs that you run. Can you just tell us what education programs Power Community provides in this space?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yes, so within the four key pillars we have 11 education programs that fit within our offerings and it really focuses around the key issues that young people are facing within those key pillars. So if you think about from a First Nations point of view, it's really aligned with national closing the gap targets, predominantly working within education, getting young First Nations students to attend school, stay in school and also transitioning to employment or study. and within the multicultural space, it's the Multicultural Power Cup, working with over 500 culturally diverse young people across South Australia and really focused around celebrating who they are, their unique cultures and also providing a platform to learn from each other. The Australian Defence Force works with children from Australian Defence Force families who face many challenges associated with relocation, parents deployment, and it's about a sense of connection and purpose through sport and that ability to be able to build relationships and then also our Respectful Relationships pillar. So our Power to End Violence Against Women program works with Year 10 boys across South Australia engaging over 2,000 young men each year and then our Empowered program works with young women focused around unpacking gender stereotypes and also educating young women about what a healthy and unhealthy relationship looks like and if they are in an unhealthy relationship, how they can exit that in a safe way.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you mentioned an online program, I think, due to be launched. Can you just tell us briefly what that's about?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yes, so that's through a consortium partnership with Centacare, Flinders University and Catholic Care NT situated in the Northern Territory and really that's a focus around, in conjunction with the e-Safety Commission, working with young people to identify, particularly in the respectful relationship space, where the real needs are within the community. It's probably no surprise that the online world is a growing concern and will continue to be. So we've worked in conjunction with young people to form a program which is integrated within the Australian curriculum. So we're looking to launch that in February next year. It's 12 modules all designed, co-designed with students to directly align with where they see the biggest challenges are online and we'll be able to facilitate that at a national scale next year.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

and I understand that you have another new initiative around Keeping Safe camps?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, so we, as part of our Santos Aboriginal Power Cup, which is really working with First Nations young people, predominantly focused around education, health and employment. We do some work in the APY lands with the communities, really driving school attendance and engagement. And recently we were delivering that particular program that began to introduce some key topics around respectful relationships. It was very high level, it was an introduction, more focused around values, leadership and getting young people to think about what healthy and unhealthy relationship looks like, and from that, the community saw great buy-in and engagement from the young people, and we actually had one of the teachers from one of the communities reach out to us to say that we need more work in this space, and as a result of that, we formed a partnership with the Office for Women to establish the Keeping Safe Camps, which is a program designed with the communities in the APY Lands really focused around understanding the key drivers of violence, digital footprint, obviously with NBN rollout into the communities, the online safety is a big consideration for young people so we're doing a lot of work within digital footprint and also some work within gender balances and dynamics as well. So we've just launched that

program with a recent trip in November this year and then we'll do multiple trips to the APY Lands next year including bringing students to Adelaide as well for a cultural immersion as well in Adelaide.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And so you've mentioned two programs that I now want to ask you a bit more about. The Power to End Violence Against Women and Empowered, which you've explained are designed for Year 10 students.

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yep.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Is that correct?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Power to end Violence Against Women is for Year 10 boys and Empowered is for Year 10 girls. And they're quite similar or closely related.

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So in general, the two programs together, can you give us a bit of background into those programs?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, absolutely. So we commenced the Power to End Violence Against Women Program in 2016, so we've been delivering that program for the past nine years. We've engaged over 15,000 young boys in that particular program and how that came about in partnership with Centacare and also the government was really identifying that when we talk about violence against women it is a gender based issue and so we wanted to come in from a primary prevention lens to speak to young men about attitudes, attitudes, behaviours, relationships and really get them to understand the key drivers of violence but more specifically the role that young men can play in this particular space and the unique hook within this particular program is obviously our brand and the players as role models and so it's co-delivered in partnership between PCL staff and also players. And a real key driver behind the messages driving through to these young people is leveraging the players' voices, role models within the community. And then in 2018, Flinders University conducted an external review on this particular program to identify some strengths, but also five key recommendations to strengthen our work within the primary prevention space. And no surprise to us, one of those recommendations was to involve young women in respectful relationships education. So as a part of that we used that to establish Empowered which initially in the planning phase was really focused around female empowerment, it was about leveraging the AFLW platform to demonstrate equal opportunities on and off field. But as that program has evolved we're really finding that it's more so about young women understanding what a healthy and unhealthy relationship looks like and a lot of the feedback we get in this program is that particularly in the work with scenarios that young women don't actually know they're in an unhealthy relationship until we have that conversation with them. And so that's been really powerful as part of that particular program.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And both programs are government funded?

**Jake Battifouco:**

They are, yep, through the Education Department.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And are they open to any schools to use?

**Jake Battifouco:**

They are, yep, yep, and we've got a really great relationship with the Education Department in terms of whether schools are at need, but obviously we know that violence against women doesn't discriminate, so we work across government, independent and Catholic schools.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So, in practical terms, what's offered in each of these programs?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yes, so we link in with the Keeping Safe Child Protection Curriculum and that is really important for us. We're certainly not experts in the prevention of violence against women. What we do very well is use player voice and the ability to leverage the power of sport and our brand to enhance the messages. So for us it's not about coming in and having a standalone program, it's about complementing the great work of the Keeping Safe Curriculum and that's really important for us to ensure that the messages are consistent, particularly when we're speaking about such important issues and education for young people. So we'll offer an hour to an hour and a half workshop over two weeks and it's important to come back and re-check in with those young people, but then also we have additional opportunities throughout the year. We have multiple leadership events, role model events where we encourage young people to bring a role model along. Obviously we want to try and use our platform to drive the messages home to young people's role models and also work in conjunction with other initiatives that are already in the community where we can add value through our brand and our players to drive those consistent messages.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

You've given us an overview of what the programs are trying to achieve. Can you give us an indication of the kinds of subjects that are covered? if you need to separate the programs...

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, yeah, so when we speak about, so very similar themes, we speak about understanding what the types of violence and abuse are, and I think that's a really important way to start the understanding. I think specifically within my work over the past nine years, I do think there is a tendency for young people to think that violence against women is just physical, and so it's an opportunity to unpack what the different types of abuse and violence looks like. We speak a lot about what it means to be a man and unpacking that from a young man's point of view and really leveraging that in terms of unpacking stereotypes and drawing the link between rigid stereotypes and violence. We speak a lot about respectful relationships, so providing some scenarios in terms of what young people may have encountered or will in the future in terms of particular scenarios they might find themselves in and how they would handle those particular scenarios. Through the evolution over the program's nine years, we didn't have any education around online, but in conjunction with the schools, it still is a huge growing concern. So we have a lot of work around digital footprint. It's something that is really important for our players to speak about how they're perceived online. So we try and draw the players' education into this particular program as the hook. And I think if we think about most sporting codes, the way in which the programs and elite sport have evolved is that it's not just about being talented on field, but it's about being good people off field, and that clubs are having that holistic approach to player education. So we're thinking about well-being, social media, drugs and alcohol, respectful relationships. And so for our players who are undertaking this education, it's about using that as the hook to show value for the young people who are involved in in the program as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So, picking up on that, tell us about the value of using sports people as role models in this kind of education.

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, it was one of the key strengths that came out of the Flinders University external review is that we look up to athletes, even though they may not think at times that they have a significant impact on young people's life in particular, so one of the key highlights from the recommendation was that for elite athletes, the messages that they're driving home hold considerable weight, meaning and relevance to young people, and so when we're hearing really important education from school teachers, if we have that player voice and have that inspiring role model in front of young people, we can have that greater influence. And I think also when we think about AFLW in particular, the visual pathways is something that's really important for young women to aspire to play AFL, which was unique 10 years ago. So that there is a great platform when we think about gender equality, leveraging that as much as possible is something that really underpins the work that we do in this space.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you've said the players are the hook to kind of get the kids in, but I think you said before that these courses are being run by Power Community staff who are trained.

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yes.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So are there any, in that sense, are there any particular approaches or skills that are important in delivering these programs?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, what is really important, particularly for our staff, and I think for any work in the primary prevention space, is that, as I mentioned before, the messages are really consistent. And because we do recognise that there is such influence, particularly with our brand, to be able to have an impact. And if that's not delivered appropriately in the classroom, it can have a negative impact as well. And if we think about working with young men, And certainly in my time, there is a tendency to think that violence against women doesn't impact me, so I feel unfairly targeted because of my gender. And so we do handle backlash when it comes to violence against women. And so for us, it's about educating young men, predominantly through the players, to say that this is not just an issue for women who are experiencing it, everyone can contribute to this. and more so it's about actually understanding what violence against women is, which I think from a primary prevention is a big opportunity for us to actually have an impact. Otherwise we're trying to solve a problem that we don't really understand. And that's what we want this particular program to be, is that platform to understand the key drivers and how it contributes to that. And I think what's been quite interestingly, Certainly in my time you assume that the players that young people want to see are the high profile players, but we delivered some focus groups with students this year in the co-design of our Power Up program. And interestingly they would like to see more players who are younger because they can resonate more with them. So if we think about we're working with 15 year old students, the youngest AFL player on our list is 18, which is not too far away from the cohort we're working with and it seems like one day you're a school student, the next day you're an elite athlete and you're in the spotlight in everything you do and there's a lot of challenges that come with that, but that's the hook that we've got, is that we can use those players to show relevance and get the young people to resonate with them because they're experiencing the same challenges they are and they've experienced the same life experiences that they had not long ago as well, so we really have evolved the program to utilise those younger players as the ability to

build rapport with the 15-year-old students involved.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

They can all do it together.

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, that's right.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And so these kind of skills in teaching, I'm not talking about the players specifically, but the people who work in this space, obviously they need to be trained and comfortable and deliver the education carefully. You talked about backlash I think, is that the kind of impact that can happen if it's not taught carefully and in line with the Keeping Safe curriculum?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, absolutely it is. I think that's what, and that's really what's, for schools in particular, there are so many different offerings of education programs across the board, but particularly in this space, and that's where the real opportunity is to ensure consistency of messaging across the program and to ensure that those messages do align with the Keeping Safe child protection curriculum as well, to ensure that there's no negative impact in terms of the education that's been done to young people, and so for us that's really important that we are continuing to evolve with the curriculum, complementing the education that is within schools and not delivering any stand-alone messages that may contradict other education that's been endorsed particularly by government.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Do you sometimes get some strong voices in the room?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yep.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

How's that managed?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, that's the real challenge and I've always found that, particularly when I was facilitating the program, as frustrating but at the same time as an opportunity to unpack it further, so you can really use those opportunities to understand how young people are thinking and their views of violence against women and what a healthy and unhealthy relationship looks like. Where we need to be as facilitators conscious is that it can create an environment where we're seeing that the male peer-to-peer aggression and to reinforce if there's obviously a student who's demonstrating some power in a cohort and is willing to express negative views towards the topic, that it can create an environment where it's reinforcing that power imbalance. And that's what's important for facilitators to be able to step in at those times and educate correctly and we work very closely with wellbeing coordinators in that space. There's never a session where the school wellbeing coordinators aren't in and also the teachers as well. So if we do see any alarming comments or attitudes in our sessions, we have follow-up sessions with the teachers and we've had that at multiple times and have found that the teachers are well aware of the students who are involved in those particular conversations and can put the right support around them and others in the room in those situations.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And moving on now, you mentioned that there was a Flinders University review of the boys' program, which is power to end violence against women, is that correct? And then has Empowered, the girls program, been reviewed?

**Jake Battifouco:**

No, not yet.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Capacity, so it's year 10 only at the moment?

**Jake Battifouco:**

It is.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Would it be a program that could be offered, obviously if you had the resources, could that be offered more broadly?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, absolutely. I think the reality with the Year 10 offering is that's where the funding is aligned and we recognise that there, and we have the conversation with schools, we certainly acknowledge this education is required at a younger age group and obviously that's what the Keeping Safe curriculum really aligns to, younger groups. If we could have those conversations earlier, we would. We've seen significant demand for this particular program which comes with concerns because some of it is reactive. So we would see on average 25 schools each year. This year we've seen 38, and that demonstrates the need for this particular program but also the challenges and the issues that schools in particular are facing in this as well. So we certainly can expand the program but also have those conversations at a younger age group as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

More generally, so stepping outside of schools, and you've outlined some of the programs that Power Communities is involved in. So can sports people be used as role models to educate more generally in the community?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Absolutely, and I think what's really important is that the athletes in particular recognise that they have a role to play as a role model, and that comes with being an elite sports person. There's a lot of pressure with that, but ultimately there's opportunity to influence. We know that, and we have seen it in the media, it can be at the detriment as well when it comes to elite sports people, particularly in this space. So it is ensuring that athletes who are delivering education, whether it's violence against women, road safety, drugs and alcohol, are equipped and willing to be able to deliver these messages aligned with the desired result. But also most importantly, they're also demonstrating the same actions and behaviours and values that they're instilling in the young people as well. So there's certainly a role to play when it comes to elite sports people in this space and it's just ensuring that they have that development and that wraparound approach to ensure that they have the capability to do that as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And what about education in sporting clubs, and particularly grassroots kids sporting clubs. Is that something that the Power Community does?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yeah, we don't. Our offerings are predominantly within school, but certainly, and the reason for that is we feel like school is the best position for us to have the greatest impact. And sporting clubs, I think, particularly at a grassroots level, there is a huge opportunity, particularly when we think about this space. And when we look at the growth of game development predominantly across the country is coming from young women playing the game now, so we need to ensure that local clubs, grassroots clubs, are equipped to be able to not only have the infrastructure around to have greater teams, but the education around, particularly when we think about gender equality, is far too many young female sporting teams training with no lights on the soccer pitch, and so we need to understand the impact of what that does at a grassroots level. So, and clubs need to be, clubs need to have the education behind what that actually looks like and it probably goes to my point before is I'm sure there's a lot of clubs there that would really love to have the greatest promotion around

gender equality but don't know where to start and I think that's where the action plans and toolkits and the education for clubs and when we speak about gender equality is so important so that we have champions within grassroot clubs that can drive this.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. We've whizzed through your evidence and I have no further questions. Commissioner, I don't know if you have any.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you, Counsel Assisting. I just have a couple of questions if I may. First of all, congratulations on your evidence. Really interesting hearing you elucidate the evidence base and talk about issues like gender equality. I've been fortunate to work with a number of footballers, men, women, non-binary AFL footballers, and you'd know the Ben Browns of the world. Others who I think have set just a shining standard, but to go to your point about it can also be to the detriment, I'm just wondering what level of education – and I understand that footballers are not necessarily rolling up or teaching these programs, but what level of education do you ensure for those ambassadors, for those footballers who are speaking publicly about these issues in an attempt to influence and impress young people?

**Jake Battifouco:**

Yes, so a lot of the education is driven by the AFL in particular, so when we speak about the Respectful Relationships space, there is a partnership between the AFL and Our Watch, and so Our Watch delivers some education to our AFL players and have got a follow-up training program for those champions of gender equality, both from the men's and women's program involved, so that's from an AFL-driven approach, but then within the clubs there's development and wellbeing managers who work really closely with players who may have a passion in a particular area and the reason for that is it's about setting the players up for life after football as well, but also aligning with what their key passions are, but also understanding from the players about the opportunity as role models and the passions that they have. So whether that be that they have a personal attachment with a particular social issue that they can leverage as much as possible or they have a personal passion, then we can connect them with the right people to have that training around them. So from our point of view, because we are working in the primary prevention space, we lean a lot on Centacare and the government to provide those education opportunities to players who are involved in our programs.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you. Just one more question. It was really interesting hearing you talking about the reactive nature of some schools or institutions, instead of them getting in on the ground for primary prevention, but actually having to deal with issues as they arise. The numbers you gave sounded quite a jump. I'm wondering to what do you attribute that, is it a combination of schools in particular realising that it's time to do something because they may have had unfortunate issues, or do you think it is a genuine desire to get on board and realise that this is part of their core business?

**Jake Battifouco:**

I do think it's a bit of both, and the reason why I refer to some reaction is because the schools would make us aware of why we're coming into, coming in to deliver the program, and that is recently, particularly this year, the two main reasons why we are delivering, I suppose, the reactive sessions is focused around young male students' behaviour towards female teachers and also image-based abuse are the two real concerns within schools at the moment. And so when we understand those particular issues prior to going into a session, we can tailor the education to really meet those needs. But they seem to be the two big issues which have been the reactive responses within schools this year. There's certainly, as we've evolved the program, there will be the growth also comes from word of

mouth as well so there may be a bit of growth there which is not reactive but there's certainly a lot that are facing a number of issues within schools and we will come in and deliver the programs off the back of those issues within the schools.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you very much. I have no further questions.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you, Commissioner. Can the witness please be excused?

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

You are free to go.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I think we will just take five minutes, Commissioner, before the next witness.

**Witness:**

**Holley Skene, Chief Executive Officer of SHINE SA**

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Thank you, welcome back to day three of public hearings for the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Today's topic revolves around primary prevention, so specifically education programs, including particularly in schools. I now ask Counsel Assisting to introduce the last witness for today.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you, Commissioner. I call Holley Skene.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

And do you truly and solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Say, I do truly and solemnly affirm.

**Holley Skene:**

I do truly and solemnly affirm.

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

And please state your full name.

**Holley Skene:**

Holley Skene

**Kerryn Hawkes:**

Thank you.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Ms Skene, you are the CEO for SHINE SA?

**Holley Skene:**

Yes, correct.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can you tell us what SHINE is?

**Holley Skene:**

I can, thank you. So SHINE SA is South Australia's leading not-for-profit provider of comprehensive relationships and sexual health services and programs for the community. So we provide a range of clinical services and education and workforce development programs, information and support to the communities of South Australia, and we have done since 1970.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And does that include providing sexual health education and training to schools?

**Holley Skene:**

Correct, it does. We have the SHINE SA Focus Schools program which I can provide some

more detail around.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Yes. Please, tell us about the Focus Schools program.

**Holley Skene:**

Thank you. I will just refer to my notes so that I don't forget anything important. So SHINE SA's education work with young people in all settings has been critical since day one back in 1970, but it was in 2003 that our current program known as Focus Schools was first established as a pilot project with 16 secondary schools in South Australia. This pilot ran for two years and the program was comprehensively and independently evaluated and subsequently rolled out and continued as a program available for all government schools with a secondary component in South Australia. So the Focus Schools program is a comprehensive relationships and sexual health curriculum based program for secondary schools and that includes now year 7 to 10. It operates in partnership with SA Health who provide funding for the program and the Department for Education who provide us with support to access schools and under a memorandum of understanding. So this program is based on the Train the Trainer approach. So we have professional, experienced and registered teachers training other registered teachers to deliver curriculum to their students. This sustains, the program sustains, ongoing relationships between schools who are engaged in the program and our teachers and provides support and connection for educators beyond the initial training with the provision of a dedicated contact known as a schools coordinator. So one of our schools coordinators will have a key contact at each school and they'll work collaboratively throughout the year so that as any issues emerge or there are additional requirements for support, they can provide that.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So I'm just going to stop you there if I can. So just to summarise what you're saying, you are training the teachers who are teaching this education and then there is a schools coordinator, so someone who works at SHINE that the teachers can then go to for guidance or help.

**Holley Skene:**

Correct.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Is it also correct that the program is actually, it's like an education program that can be followed in order to deliver the curriculum?

**Holley Skene:**

So the program is a curriculum-based whole school approach program. It involves, perhaps if I step it out a little more, so some of the key elements, it starts with establishing that whole school commitment. So a school will sign what we call a Focus Schools agreement. This includes a commitment to the 10 principles of best practice which we have, which includes a commitment to delivering the 15 lessons at each year level of the program, a commitment to undertaking the training and ongoing professional learning opportunities, assistance, it outlines also the assistance they'll receive from SHINE SA and our program teachers in support of them and their leadership. We are able to also provide assistance with talking to parents, carers and communities about the program and what that involves. And then professional development training is offered. It's a two-day training program for registered teachers and other school educators and once teachers have completed this training program, they can access the teacher curriculum books which each contain 15, 50 minute classroom lesson plans per year in years 7, 8, 9 and 10.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Fifteen 50-minute class lesson plans across Year 7.

**Holley Skene:**

Yes. And much like the others have mentioned, they are mapped to the Child Protection Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum in terms of the relevant content.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So it's a program designed to deliver the content within those curricula.

**Holley Skene:**

Correct, it does the piece, it does the work of translating that curriculum into lesson content and providing teachers with specialist training and ongoing support to understand how they can deliver that curriculum to young people in the classroom in a way that's aligned to best practice, it's evidence based, it's contemporary and relevant and the power of the model includes that professional learning component, so it's teachers who are experienced classroom teachers, but who are also subject matter experts in all things sexual and reproductive health and healthy relationships. So they're really well placed to provide that sort of peer learning and support for teachers in classrooms. So yeah, our program does not do any stand and deliver teaching of curriculum content in schools, through the whole school approach, which includes that commitment of leadership and governing council, through to expanding beyond the classroom and trying to develop a whole school culture that supports healthy relationships and respectful relationships and all of the topic areas that we're intending to deliver. Yeah, that's a critical element of the program we deliver is that whole of school capacity building approach, rather than the stand and deliver.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So you've mentioned the initial training that a teacher needs to do before they can, or the school's teachers need to do, before they can access the program. Is that training and updates provided?

**Holley Skene:**

Correct, yes, annual updates are provided and the curriculum is also reviewed comprehensively every two years. So our team of, as mentioned, we have a team of teachers who are professional teachers who are also subject matter experts who also understand curriculum and pedagogy and how to translate and incorporate the emerging issues, you know, contemporary issues around, for example, I'll just refer to my notes, there were some examples provided here, so they're actually reviewing the curriculum right now.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can I just stop you? Sorry, when you say the curriculum, do you mean the SHINE program?

**Holley Skene:**

Sorry, the SHINE Curriculum resources that support that delivery of the program. Thank you. So the Commonwealth Consent Policy Framework is being incorporated, the effective practice in violence prevention education with boys and young men, which is a new report from Michael Flood this year, resources from the e-Safety Commissioner, Being a Young Man Online 2024. So some of those recent evidence updates can then be incorporated every two years as part of that process and that's a really critical element of the program design also because keeping it contemporary and relevant to young people and their learning needs is really important in this space as many of the other speakers have highlighted today. This issue is, well these many and varied issues that we're talking about and working with, are fast evolving in many cases and so those updates are really important. Alongside that, another critical element of the program relates to feedback and how we gather and include that.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Before you go on to that, can I just ask you another question about that two-yearly review, is that something that's happening that SHINE is doing anyway, regardless of reviews of the Keeping Safe Curriculum, for example, or reviews of the Australian Curriculum?

**Holley Skene:**

Correct, that's a standard practice that we take as a program, but of course where there are other reviews going on, we participate in those both to contribute to and incorporate into our program.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then sorry, you were talking about a feedback aspect.

**Holley Skene:**

That's okay. I'm just in terms of finishing the implementation methodology of the Focus Schools program, So schools are allocated, once they've done the training and they've received their curriculum books with all their classroom lesson plans, they also have the ability to access our classroom activity packs to support interactive learning activities, the current health promotion and campaign materials that we produce but also source from many others, and introductions for training participants to SHINE SA's Sexual Health Library and Resource Centre and our clinics, which young people can access. And then we provide ongoing teaching support. So, as mentioned, they have a... each school has a dedicated SHINE SA Schools Coordinator who's also a registered teacher who provides advice to support contextualisation to their local student needs and they also access our annual update presentations at their school. They also have the opportunity to subscribe to our e-newsletter which we provide regular updates of emerging information that's useful or a new resource comes out they get that really recent and regular communication from us through our program.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Is it correct that you can also get student feedback?

**Holley Skene:**

Correct.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Can you tell us about that?

**Holley Skene:**

So another very critical element of the program is the way we incorporate the voices of students and young people and include their feedback, both in the way that the program's reviewed and updated to make sure that it's relevant and interesting and engaging and therefore effective at delivering learning outcomes for young people. It's also really important for us to monitor and evaluate program fidelity and how schools are delivering the program.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

What do you mean by program fidelity?

**Holley Skene:**

It's really about how the model is being translated into the school context. Is it as it was intended to be delivered? So that idea of, we know there are many barriers for schools and school teachers in delivering curriculum. In an ideal world, all 15 lessons at every year level would be delivered but we know that curriculum crowding or timetabling is a real challenge, particularly in the health and PE space where there's a lot of emerging health concerns and issues that people would love to be able to incorporate and include for their young people. But it's really both that monitoring, you know, what is actually happening in schools, because we're training the trainers, we're not in there delivering, we can't necessarily always control how that gets done, but it's one way we can measure that and keep continuously improving, that is through our student feedback. So, if I can just go to that part of my notes, I can tell you. So we collect that feedback via an online survey and that's been really refined over the years and the survey methodology is still preferred because it is able to be completed anonymously and confidentially by students and that's important in this

area for obvious reasons and so this provides them with the opportunity to give their experiences and their reflections on the lessons delivered to them by their teachers based on the SHINE SA curriculum, so looking at the past five years, the average numbers of students responding to the survey is over 4,000 per year in South Australia, which is quite a significant sample size. In 2023, we had 4,436 students respond to our student survey. And these results are compiled and utilised in various ways to continuously improve the program and respond to student voice. The first critical way is by including site reports. So each school receives a de-identified report based on the responses from students at their site. So it's their own students telling them what it was like to experience that program at their school. And that really helps schools understand, you know, what did they do well, where are there areas for improvement, how many lessons did their students report receiving, etc. and it can be supported by the update from our schools coordinator who then has some really granular and contextualised site-based intelligence to go to that school and say here are the areas where you could do a little bit more training or you might need to focus a bit more on this area, for example. So this way schools can directly hear from their students how they went, including whether or not students felt safe and supported in the classroom, how many lessons they recall receiving, how respectful and inclusive of different values and beliefs, and also how inclusive of LGBTQIA plus identities, which is consistently highlighted by students as an important area, and which topics were most relevant and useful, and there's more. It's also compiled into an annual report for the whole of schools in South Australia, or all student responses, I should say, in South Australia, which then can inform our schools program about what are the trends, how are students experiencing it overall across the many sites delivering the program in South Australia and I don't think I included earlier the coverage of the program.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I was going to ask about that.

**Holley Skene:**

Maybe I should finish on student feedback?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Yes please.

**Holley Skene:**

And so some of the highlights, and this report is yet to be published, but I'm able to share some of this data with the caveat of it's subject to final revision before publishing. So the 2023 student feedback shows that 78% of those over 4,400 students rated the safety and support of the classroom environment as good or excellent. 75% rate the course overall as good or excellent, and 92%, which is a critical one, on the topic of relevance and how students perceive this area of learning as relevant to them, it's 92% believe the course will be useful to them now or in the future. And I think that's a really critical one because to engage students in this learning, they need to feel that it's relevant to them and so that's something we feel is quite good.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So this feedback is being used for SHINE in developing the program and also it can be relayed back to the individual schools in relation to how it's being taught. Correct? And I will ask you about how many schools are using the program, but I just want to go back to something that you said before. You said we teach a whole school approach when you're training the teachers. What does that mean?

**Holley Skene:**

Well the program's based on a whole school approach. So evidence-based programming is critical, it's really a fundamental principle of everything we do at SHINE SA and so from the outset this program was based heavily on the existing research and that has evolved over

time and so most recently it's been assessed against the UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Schools and it was independent, it was assessed by the national peak body as compliant with all elements of that International Technical Guidance. Part of that is the whole school approach, so a whole school approach in the context of Relationships and Sexuality Education refers to having a shared vision with a focus on connection and belonging that involves the wider community. It is supported by policies and procedures, professional learning, detailed curriculum plans, pedagogy, resourcing, and representation of an authentic student voice to effectively establish a learning environment and culture where all staff feel equally, I think, it's critical that it includes the teaching environment, the teachers and the students, so it's the whole school, as well as parents and carers. So all staff feel equally respected, safe and valued and have equal opportunities. Young people can learn about gender equality and respectful relationships in and out of the classroom, and the wider community can model gender equality and respectful relationships. And as a non-government organisation providing services to the community beyond the setting of schools, we also deliver those health promotion messages broadly across the community and it's critical that it's supported in that way through that comprehensive approach.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. So now, how many schools are using the program? So is it correct that it's optional? Is it correct that any school can use the SHINE program if they sign up to be a Focus School?

**Holley Skene:**

So we're specifically funded to deliver the Focus Schools program, which includes that comprehensive approach to South Australian government schools with a secondary component. So I believe, if my numbers are correct, that that includes up to 161 schools in South Australia. We currently have, as at the last report that we submitted, 125 of those schools, so that's 78% of Department for Education schools with a secondary component signed up as a SHINE SA Focus School.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And I understand that if you remove some specialist schools out of that calculation, the percentage is much higher? Is that correct?

**Holley Skene:**

Yeah, so I've got my report here, and these numbers change as schools change, but the numbers I have here, you know, because there remains a significant need for additional support for Anangu and Aboriginal schools, so according to these numbers of the 161, 16 of those are Anangu and Aboriginal schools, 14 are special education schools and so looking at that the coverage increases to around 95 % of South Australian public schools with a secondary component.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

So you're saying if you remove those, Anangu and Aboriginal schools and the special ed schools, then of the remaining mainstream schools, if I can call them that, 95% are using the Focus Schools program.

And what about Catholic or independent schools? Are they able to use the SHINE program?

**Holley Skene:**

Yes, they are able to access the training and the curriculum resources, and also the activity packs and other support. But we don't have capacity to provide the same level of ongoing and comprehensive programmatic support, because we have limited FTE within the team. So there's a limited number of schools that they can take on to sort of manage, if you like, as their schools. So we have had, since 2018, we've had 51 Catholic and independent

schools involved in a two-day curriculum training. And we also have a primary school curriculum resource and training, which is, again, it's available on a fee-for-service basis for schools, much like the offerings to Catholic and independent schools, so not as the funded and full programmatic response, but as training and curriculum resources and support. We have, since 2014, 325 primary schools have been involved in that curriculum training through SHINE SA.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then that so they pay for that curriculum and training if they want to access it, you said, it's fee for service.

**Holley Skene:**

Yeah, there are many providers and SHINE is one of those, so that's something we also provide, but yeah, we do strongly believe in the model of the Focus School program being the critical element for success and the recommendations we provided were around scaling up that program for impact.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

How do you, or how does the program deal with, and I've asked this question earlier today, but how does it deal with children with different cognitive abilities, disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse or even Aboriginal children?

**Holley Skene:**

Yes, I have some notes on that. So the program is based on the principle of the teacher best knowing their young people, their students, and how to adapt any curriculum, be it around, you know, any topic area to the particular young people in front of them. We do provide an inclusive education training course, however, and some additional curriculum resources and information. So staff from across 10 special education centres have completed a two-day inclusive education curriculum course over the past time period, and I'm sorry I'm going to have to get that confirmed because the time period is not there. The Inclusive Education program really does that adaptation of what are the core curriculum learning outcomes and what specific resources, so that's delivered by one of our school educators who specialises in that area of work and has that ability to do that overlay of what other types of curriculum resources that could, that are available, that could be provided in a classroom with children with different learning needs.

And the same can be said for, so we also have an alternative education training course, which also includes a tailored training option, so it's critical that young people who aren't at school are also able to access this really important education. So we have a two-day training specifically for educators who are working with children and outside of the school setting. We call this our alternative education training program. So educators attending these courses may come from Focus Schools, but also other organisations who have direct responsibility for providing alternative learning opportunities for young people outside the regular class setting. So that, yeah, that's just one of the other training programs that we provide with that specialist lens. In terms of Aboriginal schools, that's something we continue to highlight as a significant need and gap in terms of a programmatic response. Between 2010 and 2016, SHINE SA was funded to deliver the Yarning On program, which employed Aboriginal educators and teachers and developed culturally informed and relevant co-design curriculum resources, educator training and community health promotion initiatives. We are now working in partnership with another organisation to deliver, so they are Sexual Health Quarters in WA, to deliver their Aboriginal specific Moorditj leader training to provide culturally informed and relevant sexual health and relationships education, however a larger programmatic response remains a significant and ongoing gap, and we certainly support increased support and investment for any kind of programmatic response that supports that.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

I'm going to move away from the details of the program, or the details of what SHINE's doing now, and I want to ask you about the importance of training teachers adequately to deliver this kind of education. So it probably seems like an obvious question, but why is it important to have teachers well trained in delivery of these subjects?

**Holley Skene:**

Well I guess my first thought on that is it's around the evidence base and the evidence of what works and what's going to have an impact, so training teachers is part of that whole school approach model. Teachers are there, many others have spoken on the critical importance of having that ongoing relationship and so that if a young person experiences a challenge or has a question, they know who to go to, who to ask and they have a safe and trusted expert who has a level of familiarity with them and also with the content and or knows where to go to get that information. But comprehensive relationships and sexual health education is a specialised learning area, inclusive of topics and content that can be considered by some as sensitive and complex and people, teachers are people, and people have their own biases and personal beliefs, values and experiences which can impact the learning experience for young people. This is important in all contexts, but particularly in relationships and sexuality education, educators need to understand the core principles of trauma-informed practice and demonstrate safety, transparency, collaboration, empowerment, and humility in their engagement with young people, and have access to the evolving language, concepts, research, etc, to ensure their practice is reflective of these emerging issues and the needs embedded in the experience of young people. We find that there's a lot of demand from teachers for this kind of training and these resources and support to deliver this curriculum. It's highly valued because there's, I guess, a desire to do it well and to understand what that looks like, what does good look like? And that training provided by teachers who are classroom teachers but who are also subject matter experts really supports them to lift their confidence and feel that they're doing the best possible job that they can to deliver that curriculum in a way that's age and developmentally appropriate, that's culturally informed, that's inclusive and accessible, that's using the right terminology, that's based on evidence, that's being reviewed by experts in the field and that they can then confidently deliver.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then if they are not trained adequately and if they're not equipped with those things that you've just spoken about, what's the consequence of that in the classroom?

**Holley Skene:**

I did have my notes in order, but I think I've gone past. So I guess it very much depends on the teacher and their experience, their confidence, and also the particular young people involved. I think if I zoom out a little bit, you know, and think systemically, it's that loss of opportunity for impact. If we're not having teachers trained to a certain standard and a shared and common understanding of what those key messages are and what the learning outcomes are and how to deliver that in a way that's going to be effective, I think it's really critical to have that shared competency framework or set of standards on what good looks like in this case. So the consistency of messaging is critical. As one of the previous speakers pointed out, we're up against many different influences externally on young people's minds and access to information is almost infinite at the moment, so being able to have that consistency of messaging year on year through a programmatic response that's incremental and mapped to curriculum and really pedagogically sound, that's going to be an impactful way of delivering the program. And to do that we need teachers to understand what good looks like.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Yeah, and to feel comfortable delivering it?

**Holley Skene:**

Absolutely, it's a level of comfort and confidence in areas like, as we've mentioned, can be considered by some as sensitive or complex or challenging, might be challenging to their own personal beliefs and biases. They may intentionally or otherwise impose their personal values and beliefs into the teaching and learning experience and this can end up in mixed messages to students or parents and carers eroding the benefits of the whole school approach, so it undermines that evidence based approach if we don't have that consistency.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And the SHINE program is based on internal school teachers delivering this education rather than external teachers?

**Holley Skene:**

Yes, the programmatic response that we have is based on the concept of teachers being best placed to deliver that education to their students. We do absolutely see the value and support individual guest speakers or topic based experts coming in and reinforcing those messages. The challenge is making sure that those messages are really well aligned and that we're not confusing messages or undermining each other's messages, so that coordination piece and that consistency of messaging is really important to ensure that impact is felt as much as possible.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And you've talked about a programmatic response, so the whole school, the whole program to deliver the message, being reinforced with perhaps some special subjects or special guest speakers. Is that what you're describing?

**Holley Skene:**

Yeah, we know that peer learning can be really powerful and important for young people and that it can't all be the teacher delivering education. We do build that in some of the curriculum resources. Many of the curriculum resources and lesson activities are based on other sources of information and discussion-based and group learning and peer learning. All that's integrated but certainly if you have people of influence that young people look up to who can come in and reinforce those messages, that really supports but fundamentally it must be underpinned by that programmatic response with that incremental learning each year level, reinforcing and building over time as the young person goes through their schooling. And so it's certainly the case, I don't know if I'm jumping ahead here, but one of the challenges or gaps is the way that once you get to year 11 and 12, which we know from some of the evidence around young people and sexual behaviours is the time at which young people start to enter into relationships for the first time and engage in sexual activity for the first time, that curriculum-based opportunity for a programmatic response becomes virtually impossible because of the way in which Year 11 and 12 works. And so opportunities for filling that gap, I think, are critical going forward.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

You've mentioned one gap which I will ask you more about, but what are some of the strengths of the Focus program and has it been evaluated or reviewed?

**Holley Skene:**

Yes, so as mentioned it started in 2003 as a pilot project and that pilot was evaluated externally over a two-year period and as a result of that program evaluation it was rolled out statewide. It's now more than 20 years on and so it's a mature program. Many of the teachers and educators who've been involved in the program have been involved for some time and have helped shape that program. It has been evaluated at other points throughout the program history. It is due for another external evaluation, I believe, and we're in the

process of looking at opportunities to engage someone to do that piece for us. However, we do that constant monitoring and evaluation through a few different mechanisms. One is the student voice, the feedback from students which we are including and incorporating into the monitoring and evaluation of the program. We also survey parents and carers and we also survey educators and teachers who deliver the program across South Australia, so there's that ongoing evaluation and quality improvement of the program which is a continuous process. But in terms of that external evaluation we did have in 2021 there was a research paper published by a PhD student who did a retrospective review of our student feedback survey and that found high levels of similarly high levels of relevance and ratings of the of the program to be quite good. In terms of other strengths of the program though I think it's that whole school evidence-based and programmatic comprehensive, sorry, and that programmatic response. While it hasn't been sort of academically evaluated by a research institute recently it was assessed as mentioned against that international technical guidance and compliant with that model. It provides educators with comprehensive curriculum lessons and resources mapped to the Australian Curriculum and the Keeping Safe Child Protection Curriculum. It's supported by a specialised library and resource centre for equitable access to resources for all schools, so if schools don't have the funds to purchase classroom activity packs, they can borrow them. It has one thing that's a strength of the program, it has a sustained history and reputation. It's valued by educators and it's connected to the majority of Department for Education schools across the state. It continues to establish networks with independent colleges and Catholic schools under that fee-for-service program and provides those training opportunities provided by specially trained teachers with subject matter expertise in primary, inclusive and alternative education systems as well. We have the evidence to support the program from the student perspective as mentioned and we know also just from the on-the-ground experience of our educators in the program that students have come to value and expect this level of education at their school and that's and that emerging topics will be part of their conversations and learning as part of that. So that ongoing relationship and the annual updates and that site-based feedback, they're all critical strengths of the program as well.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And then what about gaps, and you mentioned the fact that Year 11 and 12 don't have this curricula directed at them, are there any other gaps?

**Holley Skene:**

So I think, as I've mentioned, the Focus Schools program is funded for years 8 to 10 in government schools with a secondary, sorry, government schools with a secondary component. Sorry, it was years 8 to 10. When year 7 was added, no additional resources were provided, so you know, we've absorbed that additional workload at this point, but yeah, that, and this is obviously something I think, everyone could do more with more resources but I think the strength, the other strength of the model is that it's quite scalable so with each schools coordinator, we have the capacity to provide support to an additional 25 to 30 schools, so it's a scalable model. There's gaps in the primary school element, so we know the evidence strongly suggests that starting younger will have a bigger impact, that young people need to learn about these topics before they experience them for the first time, so that they're equipped with the critical knowledge, skills and know where to go and what to do if they do encounter misinformation, or if they do encounter challenging topic areas that they don't know about, that they have that information ahead of time, and we know about the gaps that I've just mentioned in years 11 and 12 being really important to find a way to deliver this critical sexual health information services and learning when they need it most in the years 11 and 12. Umm, pre-service teacher training?

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

What do you mean by pre-service training?

**Holley Skene:**

A teacher in training, as far as I understand, it's an elective topic in some teaching degrees for the sexual health and relationships education or respectful relationships education. It's not a core unit in any particular teaching degree, as far as I'm aware, at this point in time, and so that's one gap that we would encourage to be looked at and considered how that could be incorporated going forward. I think you probably will have picked up, there's also this challenge of consistency of language and then what is the shared understanding of what are we talking about when we say consent education versus respectful relationships education versus comprehensive relationships and sexual health education and there are many other variations of that terminology and so developing that shared understanding of what we're talking about when and what that means and how that translates through the curriculum and into the school and into the experiences of young people and students in the education system I think would be helpful.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

And does that apply across the different education sectors as well?

**Holley Skene:**

Absolutely, yeah. So there are absolutely challenges for schools in delivering a pragmatic response such as the Focus Schools program. It's just about timetabling, competing demands, priorities and the pragmatic reality of day-to-day in schools. It's obviously resourcing constraints, and also that coordination across systems and schools. So I think with the development of the approved providers list there's an opportunity I think to have a look at that whole of system in South Australia, who's doing what and how and when and how does that complement and work together as a state-wide approach. Previously I'm not sure that we've had visibility over that, over who's doing what, where and how, and schools need to have flexibility and freedom to deliver the program that works best for them. So it's not about one program doing it all, it's about how all the moving parts fit together to make the whole, and influence positive outcomes for all young people in South Australia.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

Thank you. I have no further questions, Commissioner.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Although that sounded like a lovely tune to end on, I just want to ask two quick questions, if I may Ms Skene. First of all, I'm curious about how stretched your workforce is, or what demands there may be. And secondly, to go back to Counsel's point about the whole of school approach, what level of buy-in exactly is there across that school community? I know you referred to some aspects. But are we talking about the Board of the school, the staff of the school, as well as the parents and broader community and obviously students, and the teachers.

**Holley Skene:**

Yes. So, I had something else on the whole school approach, but maybe, can you take me back to your first question, please Natasha?

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Well, forgive me for asking both in a row, but the first one relates to workforce, and I am imagining whether it's stretched, whether or not you need more resources, whether or not there is a training component that means that there's a pipeline that is there for people with these relevant skills. And we heard from a witness earlier that there's more and more demand for some of these courses for a range of reasons and this level of education. How do you meet that demand?

**Holley Skene:**

Well, I think, as mentioned, the model that we have means that it is quite scalable, because

one, if you compare that to trying to reach into every classroom and stand and deliver, training teachers to deliver that to their students, we can reach much further with much smaller FTE investment. That being said, yes, our schools program is incredibly stretched and there's incredibly high demand and there's a very consistent and strong message that more FTE is required in the schools program. As mentioned, the program delivers a range of training and opportunity to access curriculum resources and support outside of those 125 odd schools who are engaged in the program, but we are unable to offer them the evidence-based whole of school programmatic response that will really make a difference and have an impact, that's based on the evidence and that is based on those 10 principles of best practice. So I don't have numbers in front of me for what FTE do we need to deliver the primary schools program or what FTE would we need to deliver, but the demand is definitely strong. Certainly in the last financial year we delivered 59 training sessions and 688 teachers completed the training and around just an extra bit, a third of those were delivered in regional areas so there's definitely the demand and the need for additional FTE and a culturally safe and appropriate programmatic response for Anangu schools and providing that training across the APY Lands and to Aboriginal schools, led by Aboriginal teachers and educators in partnership with communities and services, is definitely a gap. There's also so many competing demands in other areas of the work that we do. You mentioned inclusive education for children and young people with disabilities, including in cognitive disabilities or other types of learning differences. And also a really critical element that we haven't touched on significantly is demand from schools for training in supporting LGBTQIA+ students and young people, which has been increasing over time as well. So to your second question about the whole school approach, I'm happy to provide, try and flesh it out a little bit more, because I know it has been mentioned many times across the day and it seems a little abstract maybe, but it's about ensuring that yes, we present the program to Governing Council and leadership and they sign on to an agreement. There's an understanding of what that agreement means in practice, so it's about committing to delivering the program as it's intended, so there's 15, 50-minute lessons at all the year levels. Schools are then supported in an ongoing way, there's a relationship between our school's coordinator and the school, they nominate a key contact, we provide ongoing updates and support and also can respond if there are incidents at school to support the broader school community to respond when those incidents may arise. But we also have developed our 10 principles of best practice and they really help schools understand and deliver on the whole school approach as well. So that's about ensuring leadership support that includes Governing Council, that includes parents and carers, and includes the students and their input, which we collect and provide as feedback into both the course itself, the curriculum resources, the training, and then also in our discussions with schools and it's about those additional resources that we're able to provide in an ongoing way as well through the library and resource centre. So it's about looking at it from that holistic approach. It's not just stand and deliver this lesson in the classroom. It's about the school community broadly and how that sits within the broader community and that's where I referenced earlier some of the health promotion programs and messages that we disseminate to the broader community and services that we provide within the broader community that students and young people are able to become aware of and then later access as and when they need to. That's part of that approach as well. Does that answer the question? I'm not sure, but I'm happy to try again.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

That's great. I know that when we talk about primary prevention generally, there's that sense of when you embed that in a community, in a workplace or a school, that it's not just about a single cohort, it's that ownership, an all in and that includes educators and families.

But I just wanted to tease out what you meant by whole of school. So that's really helpful, thank you very much. I'm not sure if Counsel Assisting has any further questions.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

No, thank you Commissioner, I ask that the witness be excused.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

You're free to go, Ms Skene.

**Katie-Jane Orr:**

That brings us to the end of today's witnesses Commissioner, so we might adjourn until tomorrow.

**Natasha Stott Despoja AO:**

Well, in which case, I suggest everyone is free to go as we've reached the end of today's discussion on primary prevention in schools. And tomorrow, join us for the fourth day of public hearings for the Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence.