ROYAL COMMISSION
INTO DOMESTIC, FAMILY
AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE
RECORDED PROCEEDINGS: WEDNESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2024

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Good morning and thank you for being here today or listening and watching online. My name is Natasha Stott-Despoja and I'm the Commissioner leading this Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence. Before we commence the proceedings today, I would like to invite Senior Kaurna man, Robert Taylor, to give us a welcome to country.

Robert Taylor:
Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My name is Robert Taylor. I'm a proud senior Kaurna man from here in Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains. And I greet you with Niina marni. Niina marni is a basic greeting meaning are you good? And we hope you're well. We're blessed down here on Kaurna country today in Adelaide, South Australia. This place has been called Adelaide for a short amount of time. But for thousands of years to Kaurna people and surrounding Aboriginal groups, it's been known as Tarntanyangga and it's a special place. It's the dreaming place of the big red kangaroo. On behalf of my Kaurna elders and ancestors past and present, I welcome you here today onto Kaurna country. For those of you that are tuning in from far and wide, we hope that you feel the blessings of the land that you are gathered on. I extend my respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout this great land and we hope that you all have a wonderful festive season. We live in one of the most multicultural countries in the world. It's very important for us all to come together. Let us not forget the past, let us not dwell on the past, let us all walk together as one in harmony. Natasha, thank you very much.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Thank you. Thank you Mr Taylor for your welcome to country. I also begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Kaurna people. I pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging and also to any elders from other communities who may be present or watching today. I feel a great sense of honour to sit here today on day one of our Royal Commission public hearings. As we start the very important piece of work, of hearing from witnesses and experts in the domestic, family and sexual violence sectors. Firstly, I want to speak to everyone who has been affected by the scourge that is domestic, family and sexual violence. The many victim survivors, the majority of whom are women and children, but also across all genders, all ages, all backgrounds. I want to acknowledge their experience and express my deepest condolences to the loved ones of those who have died and my respects to those who continue to suffer from this horrible epidemic. I also want to thank everyone who has contributed to the Royal Commission so far. I can assure you that your information, your input, makes a difference. We are listening and we respect and value your voice. I believe that this will lead to, I hope, practical recommendations that will drive meaningful change and help address domestic, family and sexual violence in our state once and for all. We commenced this Royal Commission with a four-month listening stage, during which I visited regional and metropolitan areas of South Australia, meeting people who work in the sector, agencies who support those affected, and importantly, listen directly to those who have lived experience. It was a privilege to be trusted with those stories.

I've been honoured to sit with people who have shared their lived experience, to listen and hear their experiences, not just of the system, but also of the services designed to protect them. Significantly, we are a forward-focused Royal Commission, not investigating individual matters per se, but looking at the systems, where they fail, where the gaps are, and what can be done to make them work better. What is best practice, and how do we get there? So far, it's involved hundreds, hundreds of hours of meetings, listening to people, including talking to those who know the system best. We've also received more than 300 submissions and more than 500 responses to our Share With Us survey tool. We have held more than 80 listening sessions, that's more than 80 listening sessions, visited five regional locations and many site visits across metropolitan Adelaide. We've established an Aboriginal Partnership Committee, which is a unique way for me to walk alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and I thank each member of that committee for their advice and input so far. I also want to thank our Royal Commission Advisory Group, a valuable and important sounding board for my team and me. All of these insights and data are so important and they're helping us to refine our inquiries and shine a light on what we need to get more detail about. This information, along with everything we've heard during the listening sessions, has helped build a picture for me. We've seen some key themes emerging. We're hearing about important issues such as the importance of prevention, early intervention, the need for greater support for children and young people, the complexity of service delivery in remote and regional areas, right through to discussions about how we hold more accountable those people who perpetrate this violence, as well as providing more behavioural education for people who use violence. We've heard about, received and researched an extraordinary amount of information that brings us to today. So, we now begin our next phase of work, our public hearings and taking of oral evidence, further adding to the body of work that we have already accumulated. These hearings will be conducted in relation to several selected topics or themes, based on the information that we've received. Our website covers many practical matters associated with these public hearings, including more information about the live streaming, witnesses and the topics to be covered. These will be updated every day or prior to the hearing day. My hope is that these hearings will draw out evidence related to these specific topics or themes to define or clarify key issues, to test ideas and draw out information, or to highlight areas of focus for the Commission's inquiry. I do know that some of the evidence that will be presented may be confronting, perhaps very difficult to hear, and I know that I and the team have been very affected by many of the stories and submissions that we've heard. We will provide information about support services. I have highlighted some of the themes that have been emerging, but if anyone would like to know more about the Commission's work, we have just published a paper, The Journey So Far. It's available on our website and it reflects the evidence and the submissions that have been provided thus far. When people ask me what is my aim for this Royal Commission, what do I want to achieve, it's very clear to me. I want to identify ways to make the systems better so that we can eliminate, reduce at least, the scourge that is domestic family and sexual violence in South Australia and beyond. I'm driven to see this violence eliminated beyond our South Australian borders. I want to see meaningful change. This means generational change and suggestions we can make

to improve the processes and the systems in our state. I want to present findings next year that will hopefully change and save lives. I thank everyone for their engagement and their goodwill. Thank you for being here today. I now call on Counsel Assisting.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Thank you, Commissioner. We are commencing hearings of the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence with two days focused on two different topics. Today, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence and Housing, and tomorrow, aspects of the Health and Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Violence. Before we commence, for anyone following on the live stream or watching the recording of this hearing later, as the Commissioner said, please be aware that the content of today's hearing may be distressing. 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. I also want to address some of the language that we intend to use through today's hearing and acknowledge that not all people prefer to use these terms. 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. We intend to use the term victim-survivor to refer to people who have experienced or who are currently experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence. This term is intended to also include children and young people who have witnessed or have been exposed to violence against a parent or guardian, together with children and young people who have directly experienced domestic, family or sexual violence. We will endeavour to use the term person who uses violence when referring to an individual who uses domestic, family or sexual violence to cause harm to another. However, we may also use the term perpetrator because it's often used in the context of programmes and services that are offered to people who use violence. Turning then to the subject of today's evidence, domestic, family and sexual violence and housing. Access to safe and secure housing is one of the most basic human rights, but, as we are no doubt all aware, Australia is in the grip of a housing crisis. The Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report from 2022 to 2023 found that in South Australia, 19,400 people sought assistance for homelessness. That is one in 94 South Australians who received homelessness assistance. Notably for this Royal Commission, domestic and family violence is identified in that report as one of the leading causes of homelessness for people in Australia. That same Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report from 2022 to 2023 indicated that nationally around 38 % of all clients reported having experienced domestic or family violence, and 75 % of those clients were female. And in South Australia in 2022-2023, 25 % of clients seeking homelessness assistance sought assistance due to domestic or family violence. Again, the majority were female. In the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children for 2022-2032, there is a clear focus on the importance of access to safe and affordable accommodation for women and children who are experiencing violence. Both to improve access to housing for these women and children, and to support women to stay in their own homes when they choose to do so. Through its work so far, the Royal Commission has learned that in South Australia, domestic and family violence and housing instability are also linked

through funding. We understand that South Australian domestic and family violence services are primarily funded through the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness, known as the NASHH. We have learned that domestic and family violence and homelessness service providers are grouped into five alliances who are responsible for distributing the NASHH funding to their service partners. We have heard that as the demand for those services has increased, there have been limitations on the services that this sector is able to provide to people experiencing or at risk of experiencing domestic and family violence. In particular, we've heard that there is an urgent need for more crisis and transitional accommodation that better meets the needs of all victim survivors escaping domestic, domestic, family and sexual violence. We've heard that the lack of availability of housing has exacerbated the difficulties faced by an already stretched system. We've heard that certain individuals are often excluded from access to specialist domestic and family violence services and homelessness responses, including young people, male victim survivors and LGBTQIA+ people. and we've heard that recovery and healing as well as intervention and primary prevention need a long-term approach to service delivery. This public hearing does not aim to identify a pathway out of Australia's housing crisis. What we seek to do is to obtain evidence about and deepen our understanding of the South Australian domestic and family violence system and its interaction with the homelessness system and to understand how a person navigates through those systems, including victim-survivors, children and young people, Aboriginal people and also people who use violence. The first witness we will hear from to commence our public hearings is Maria Hagias. Ms Hagias is the CEO for Women's Safety Services SA, the largest domestic and family violence service provider in South Australia. She has been working in the sector for many years and gave evidence at the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015. At that Royal Commission, Ms Hagias spoke about the new model that South Australia was following at the time for the provision of domestic and family violence and housing services. Today she will talk to us about the history of the sector, how the model came about, and she will reflect on how things have changed between then and now. We will then hear evidence from a panel of five witnesses. They are representatives from each of the five Homelessness Alliances in South Australia. We will hear from them about the Alliance structure and how the system is operating in practise, including how housing availability is impacting them. This afternoon we will focus on some particular groups of people. We will hear about pathways through the housing and domestic and family violence systems for these people, and some programmes that are being provided in South Australia. We will hear from Louise Kelly, who is the Deputy CEO of OARS Community Transitions. OARS works with people who have committed criminal offences or people who are at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. This includes people who use violence. She will tell us about a perpetrator response pilot that they are running which provides accommodation and other services for people who have used or are at risk of using domestic or family violence. Next, this afternoon, we will hear from Olive Bunnell, who is the CEO of Nunga Mi:Minar. Nunga Mi:Minar is an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation which provides frontline services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and their families who are impacted by domestic and family violence. She will tell us about what she sees to be some of the

system gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the programmes Nunga Mi:Minar is running and how they provide accommodation and other services in a culturally appropriate way. And finally for today we will hear from Nicole Chaplin who is the CEO of St John's Youth Services. St John's work with young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness including as a result of domestic, family or sexual violence. She will tell the Royal Commission about the youth Foyer programme that they are delivering to support young people at risk of homelessness. Thank you Commissioner. I call Ms Maria Hagias.

Witness:
Maria Hagias, CEO, Womens Safety Services 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.
Maria Hagias:
I do truly and solemnly affirm.
Kerryn Hawkes:
Please state your full name.
Maria Hagias:
Maria Hagias.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Good morning, Ms Hagias. So you are the CEO of Women's Safety Services in South Australia?
Maria Hagias:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Known as WSSSA, and is it correct that WSSSA is the largest domestic family violence service provider in the state?
Maria Hagias:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
How long have you been the CEO of WSSSA?
Maria Hagias:
Since 2016.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And how long have you worked in the domestic family violence sector in South Australia?
Maria Hagias:
30 years.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So it's safe to say you've been working in the sector for a long time and you've seen it evolve and develop.
Maria Hagias:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
We are aware that in 2015 there was a Royal Commission in Victoria domestic and

family violence.
Maria Hagias:
mmm.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And in July of 2015 you gave evidence at one of their public hearings, like you are today. And on that day it was dedicated to housing and homelessness.
Maria Hagias:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
You gave evidence about the domestic family violence sector in South Australia at the time and what was at that time a new model in South Australia, an integrated model for housing support and a safety first approach.
Maria Hagias:
Thank you.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Can you tell us about what was going on in South Australia at the time of that Royal Commission?
Maria Hagias:
Yeah.I, you know, upon reflection and particularly when I was called to the Royal Commission, it was really important to sort of look back how we got to obviously being called in 2015 to share our learnings and really the new models that South Australia had implemented which were quite leading. This sector had a number of reviews and reforms prior to that and I think, you know, when I think back about that and reflecting on it, it was really an environment where we applied flexibility, we ensured that we pivoted as needs and demands changed and it was a system that was developed on the basis of what individuals needed to support them as opposed to individuals fitting into a system. And that was really positive. And we've got to remember also, demand was very different in those years. So the first review, and please remember this is an overview, I don't remember all the ins and outs, but the first review was in 1997. And it was a review and reform of women's shelters. The focus was on women's shelters. And the outcomes out of that review was broadening accessibility and access. And that was a time when crisis accommodation was communal living. And communal living just in its nature excluded families. And also one of the commitments through that was investment in infrastructure to move into a core and cluster model, which was much more conducive for families who were experiencing domestic violence and obviously experiencing the trauma associated with domestic violence. That investment and South Australia, you know, changing from community to core and cluster took probably about 10 years.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Can I just stop you for a second, when you say core and cluster, what type of accommodation is that?
Maria Hagias:
So they're, I'll try to explain this, they're individual units and also within that complex there's also facilities for counselling groups and offices.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So sorry, that went on for the next 10 years.

Maria Hagias
So that went over a period of time and then, you know, South Australia was the first state really to have that type of accommodation. So as we were, I guess, moving into this reform process, around 2009 there was a new Federal Government. The focus around that time was homelessness. The Federal Government was really keen in reviewing our new agreements and also what the strategic directions of homelessness was going to look like and I think what was key there was a national consultation and a white paper was delivered out of that process. The key strategic directions were, and I guess continue to be, is the sector's focus was working with people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. And so early intervention and prevention was clearly identified during that period. But also there was a significant amount of money and investment nationally into the homelessness sector.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And when you talked about the new agreements, are you referring to what was then called the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement?
Maria Hagias
Yeah, because if I remember correctly, it went from SAC, which was the Supported Accommodation Assistance programme, to NAHA.
Katie-Jane Orr: And NAHA, which is the one you've just referred to has now become the NASHH.
Maria Hagias:
And so, and between 2010 and 2015, there were a number of reviews and reforms, obviously during that period. But I think the key thing there was that South Australia took the opportunity, as opposed to just distributing money and, you know, I'm being pretty simplistic here, but, you know, changing contracts. It was a real opportunity to really rethink in how our sector was going to look. And I think that is the beauty of South Australia in relation to taking those opportunities and really reforming and doing that in partnership with the sector. And also during that period as well, up until 2015, the thing that was also really important and critical, and we felt particularly when we're focusing on DFV, all the reforms were aligned with not only obviously the homelessness priorities but also the South Australian Women's Safety Strategy, State Strategic Plan and obviously we saw the first iteration of the National Plan, so it was really aligning all of those directions and initiatives with where we were going.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So those strategies that you've just mentioned now, are they all connected to domestic family violence? You've also mentioned the strategies to address homelessness and risk of homelessness included intervention and prevention.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah, early intervention, yep.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Sorry, early intervention and prevention. Is that how domestic family violence fits into that scheme?
Maria Hagias:
Yes, yes, so homelessness was not only about those people right at the crisis end, it was about how do we avoid people getting into that bit. I think it's really, probably easier to sort of understand when I went to the Victorian Royal Commission is what did services look like in 2015, and at that stage I was the manager of Central

Domestic Violence Service, so I can talk about certainly the services that we provided metro wise.
We also moved from the term shelter to DV services and the purpose of that was to really, it was important that it was encompassing of all the types of services we were providing within those regions. So obviously it included crisis accommodation, transitional support and supportive housing and at some point, not sure what the year was, there was also 120 stimulus properties that came into the sector for the whole homelessness sector and some of those properties, and again Louise probably will know this better than I do, were dedicated to perpetrator housing. And that was supporting women to remain in their own home and removing the perpetrator. So obviously we provided crisis accommodation. We provided outreach support.

Katie-Jane Orr:
What do you mean by that?

Maria Hagias:
So outreach, what it meant was that we were able to engage women who weren't necessarily needing accommodation. How did that look? You know, those outreach services was for our service, we had a duty system where women could actually call in, requesting support, and obviously we would conduct risk assessment, safety management and pathways into services that were required, not necessarily accommodation.
It could eventually be accommodation but it could be into our groups, it could also be case managers that were within our services. So it was really about focusing around what was needed for that family, that person at that time. There are also the opportunities, can I also be clear with all of this that I'm talking about? We didn't do this in isolation, it was in partnership with our other non-government agencies and government, so it's quite a holistic wraparound type services. Other ways that we would try to engage cohorts of women that necessarily again wouldn't come into crisis accommodation was through relationships with local police prosecution where women would want to vary an order or drop charges, procedures, police prosecution would refer those women to our services and we would conduct risk and safety reports. It was a real opportunity, again, to talk about risk, safety, but also to inform them of the support services that were around. Now, they may, you know, grab that opportunity then. If not, you know, we did find women reconnect down the track. We also had workers based at local magistrates' courts, I remember, and that was particularly when intervention orders were being heard, we would support women through a court process but also then do exactly the same thing later, provide information about services and connect them to services if required. So they're just some examples, we ran groups, they were also for women that were in accommodation as well as outreach. We had dedicated children's workers but also can I say alongside that homelessness also had funded Together for Kids which was a specialist programme which is run by RASA to provide support and intervention to children in the homelessness sector.

Katie-Jane Orr:
So it's safe to say you were able to become involved with these people at an early stage.

Maria Hagias:
Yeah, it was really critical I think that it was about providing services at whatever point a woman was at and being able to intervene early potentially could mean that they wouldn't journey into crisis. So I think we all agree that crisis is really important. You know sometimes there is no choice but for a woman to leave. But there's a whole group that their circumstances are very different. They may not want to leave, they actually might have their resources to be somewhere else. There's a whole lot of different scenarios. But I think, again, what's really critical to understand is that the system and how South Australia really led was doing their best to create a system that actually fit that person and their individual needs. But can I also add, by the time, 2015, you know, there was a number also of external factors that were happening around that time where, I don't know, I think we knew that demand would increase, I just, I think, yeah, I think we missed our opportunity post-2015 because around that time the implementation of the National Plan, which was the first National Plan, and rightly so, community awareness increased. We had, you know, again during that 15-year period, amazing people such as Rosie Batty and the Abrahimzadeh children, who actually went public to share their stories around the impact of DV. And of course, that raised the profile around domestic violence and what we did see, and rightly so, was that gradual increase in people seeking services.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I'm going to ask you more about that demand in a moment.
Maria Hagias:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Can I just take you back to the services that were being provided on the ground around the time of the Victorian Royal Commission and how about the entry point into it?
Maria Hagias:
Yeah, thank you, that's a really good question. Around that time when we were doing reform, it was known as Gateway to Service. And again, the homelessness money, particularly for DFV, not only funded the shelters as we knew the regional, sort of all the regional DV services they were called by then, also it was DV Crisis Line or DV Outreach Service, there's been iterations of that, and Migrant Women Support programme. Going back to access, when we were talking about access, it was really critical and certainly government led around creating a system that there was a gateway to service. So regardless of where a woman would enter, whether it be through our regional DV services, DV Crisis or Migrant Women, they would receive a service of risks assessment, and safety management and pathways into the system, as opposed to women being sent to different services to get the support. So, and that wasn't only for DFV, obviously that was for the whole of the homelessness sector. What that meant is that every single one of us were responsible to ensure that we provided the appropriate support interventions and safety oversight. and obviously risk assessments right at the point of call.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I just, still in the 2015 period, in the before period, you've explained to us about the NASHH funding and the homelessness model. Is it correct that even in providing these domestic family violence services there was still some connection to

homelessness that was required as part of that funding model in regards to working with people who are homeless due to domestic and family violence or the death. Is there any criteria that were imposed in relation to homelessness for people accessing those services at that time?

Maria Hagias:

Ah, not that I recall. Obviously, if you were homeless because of DFV, you received a service...

Katie-Jane Orr:

And what about the people, I think you've answered this already because you've spoken about earlier intervention or prevention, but people who were not homeless were still being provided with domestic family violence services.

Maria Hagias:

Yeah we were providing and again we've got to be put it in context in relation to what demand looked like and really during that period yes, that was provided and I think post 2015 well you know even a little bit prior to 2015 we were really seeing demand increase.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And I think you explained earlier that in tackling homelessness the strategy was to look to early intervention and prevention.

Maria Hagias:

Absolutely.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Which included addressing domestic and family violence

Maria Hagias:

Absolutely, and I think we can all safely say that is really having really robust responses around early intervention and prevention will hopefully prevent women going into that sort of crisis.

Katie-Jane Orr:

So the fact that there was this connection to the homelessness funding was no impediment to those services being able to be provided?

Maria Hagias:

No, that was a strategic direction that also came out from the initial NAHA, was homelessness or at risk of homelessness and early intervention and prevention strategies was a priority.

Katie-Jane Orr:

It probably seems quite obvious, but can you explain the benefits of this flexible approach?

Maria Hagias:

I think that as I said before is when it takes a lot of courage for someone to call during a time of trauma and crisis and to be able to have a system that fits around their needs regardless of where they live, you know what their circumstances are, is a system that fits in to individual needs, as opposed to individuals fitting into a system is really critical. A system that screens in and doesn't screen out is really critical.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Can you explain what a safety first approach is?

Maria Hagias:
We, when safety, when we, there were some challenges being under the homelessness agreement and housing of course critically was really critical to people's journey into safe secure accommodation. What was critical for us, and particularly for the sector, advocating for a Safety First model, we needed to really recognise that a family's experiences of domestic violence needs to be considered in a model. Safety First is really critical that at the point of interaction, our work with that family is ensuring that they are safe, that actually their journey towards housing, yes they're homeless or they may not be, but addressing the safety needs of that family up front was really critical.
Katie-Jane Orr:
As opposed to just addressing the housing?
Maria Hagias:
As opposed to just addressing the housing, because remembering that a family that chooses to leave a home because of domestic violence, it's not about being able to sustain a tenancy, it's because of the behaviour of another person.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And, sorry, earlier you were saying that there was an increase in demand because there were external factors going on…. So, can you reflect now, compared with, and I think we've asked you to do this in preparation for today, let's look back at that time that you gave evidence in Victoria?
Maria Hagias:
Yeah. Look, as I mentioned that as we were extremely pleased to see the issue of domestic and family violence and sexual violence. Sorry, let me just go back. We were really happy in relation to the fact that there was a lot more community awareness surrounding domestic and family violence and sexual violence. And I mentioned some of the factors that sort of really raised that profile. What we knew was demand was going to increase. Demand has continued to increase post-2015 and will continue to increase. What happened though was funding stalled. So demand increased, but funding didn't increase. So I'm being, you know, I'm just being, I'm really summarising this, obviously for the Commissioner and for yourself, is that what happened then was that there were some tough choices that needed to be made and that was redirecting funding from that early intervention sort of prevention into the crisis end. So where we're now is that the majority of our work is imminent risk and homeless.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Imminent risk of?
Maria Hagias:
Domestic and family violence and homeless. And so that is the majority of our work now. We had to pull away from the outreach work in the regional services. We had to pull back from some of those initiatives that I talked about around risk and safety reports, attending courts, group work. The demand just continued to increase and our ability to meet that demand, we needed to make decisions.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So the funding structure hasn't changed, the model is the same, but a structure which previously allowed flexibility. Due to demand, criteria have been imposed…

Maria Hagias:
That's right. being created. That's right. And also, can I just add to that, so there, you know, during that period as well, when it came, talking about accommodation, we obviously had the crisis accommodation, the transitional and supportive, and motels then became an option because women needed, because of demand, the need for motels because there was no shelter accommodation where women were going. So motel was emergency accommodation added you know at the front end of that before they moved through. Now there's, we have challenges in regards to that and I think you mentioned it before I came on that women moving through that accommodation has become really difficult because of housing supply and access and cost. So blockages of the system that were not necessarily an issue years ago are now becoming an issue.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Can you explain that a bit further, what you mean by blockages of the system?
Maria Hagias:
If women aren't able to access private rental and the difficulty of housing supply, you know, they stay put, right? So we aren't having that flow through from motels into crisis right through. So from stays of potentially six weeks in the crisis accommodation into transitional property, that's lengthened, that's lengthened now.
Katie Jane Orr:
You talked about previously the sector was moving and shifting to meet the needs of the community. Can you reflect on that now?
Maria Hagias:
Well I think now we're a system that, you know, I talked a little bit about a system that should screen in as opposed to screen out, unfortunately now we're a system that screens out instead of screening in, and obviously our decisions are made at that imminent risk. I do want to say also, I mentioned gateway to service before, and every service was a gateway to service. Again, we redirected that because obviously, particularly in the metro regions, the demand was so high, we shifted that to the DV Crisis Line. So DV Crisis Line then became that sort of gateway to service who then would conduct the assessments and then move women through and refer into the system.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So now it's one phone line.
Maria Hagias:
So now it's coming through at the moment. And I do want to say, too, that if women call in, we don't, you know, I just want to be really clear, is that we will do our utmost best to support every woman that calls in. So it's, I want to make that clear. But I do, can I just add a little bit about the DV Crisis Line? And I just need to see this, to have a look at this. So I just want to talk about the entry point into this system and where we are right now. The calls continue to increase and I also want to add that the Royal Commission itself on the 1st of July the domestic violence crisis line had the highest number ever calls in its time. So you know all these factors and we are so happy that it's raising awareness and that you know people are ringing in. But I just want to understand the demand. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service is tracking, in December this year, we're anticipating around 35,000 calls in
in the year.

35,000 calls, since recognising that it was in 2018, I believe, roughly around that time, that DV crisis line went from a Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm service to a 24-hour service. And that was possible through funding through the AGDs. And any top-up that we've had to support that sort of 24-hour line has come from the AGDs – the Attorney General's Department. Now, we can't answer, as of today, we can only answer 70 % of those calls and that figure will go up and down and could vary from 60 % to 80 % depending on demand. This is an extreme challenge and I go back to the fact that it takes a lot of courage for people to call in and when you can't pick up that phone to support that person at that time, rightly so, there are extreme frustrations. We do our best to call back as soon as we can.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Thank you.

Maria Hagias:
Not only, and external stakeholders will also refer to us, and there are frustrations not only from people who are trying to call in, but also external stakeholders because they can't get through, and rightly so. So, that puts significant stress also on our frontline staff, who I think do this work because their commitment to social justice is extremely high and when you can't reach every person that calls, it is extremely distressing. And I just want you to understand that those 35,000 incoming calls, and we answer 70 % of those on average, on those 70 % there's another roughly 52,000 to 55,000 calls that are made to support families. The demand is significant and the system isn't coping and it's at crisis point.

Katie-Jane Orr:
I've got some statistics here which is actually from the submission that you also made to the Royal Commission. You might have them in front of you.

Maria Hagias
Oh no, I don't actually.

Katie-Jane Orr:
The data represents that there was a 45 % increase in calls to the crisis line from 2021 to 2022. a 38 % increase in the following year.

Maria Hagias:
Yeah.

Katie-Jane Orr:
.. so from 2022 to 2023 and then if we're looking at since 2021 to now

Maria Hagias:
Yeah.

Katie-Jane Orr:
101.6 percent increase

Maria Hagias:
Yes.

Katie-Jane Orr:
without the funding to match?

Maria Hagias:
No. And I think that we've got the basis of what we did between 1997 and 2015. I think and the principles and the foundations that we applied around reform meant that we were doing our best to be on the front foot. And so I don't think there's anything new we need to learn. I think we can sometimes reflect back on.

Katie-Jane Orr:
We talked before about what you were doing on the ground.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and you gave good examples of that and I think you've covered lots of things now, is there anything else about the situation now on the ground that you can think of reflecting about how things have changed? You talked about needing to use motels.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah.
Katie-Jane Orr:
as Crisis Accommodation, you've given us some information about the crisis line.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah.
Katie-Jane Orr:
the housing blockage, and I think you said we're not able to do outreach or we're not able to do that early intervention work.
Maria Hagias:
And in saying that as well, we currently have initiatives that are funded through the National Partnerships that are early intervention, they're pilot programmes. That were obviously work that the sector did together with Office for Women to look at what were some of the priorities to use some of that National Partnership money to provide early intervention and recovery programmes. their pilot and their postcode, they're not statewide. So in the metro region, they're only available in the east and the west, and at the moment we've got waiting lists. So we know that early intervention programmes, I can't anticipate or say, well, this is how many people are going to be seeking that, because the system at the moment, it doesn't allow us to understand the demand, but as those programmes came up and were implemented, we saw demand increase really quickly, which we anticipated that would happen.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Examples on the ground is what I asked about?
Maria Hagias:
So there are those programmes that are available.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I think you have given us examples of how things have changed that way too. I've nearly finished, but I do just want to give some context for the next witnesses that we're going to be hearing from. So after you, after a short break, we're going to hear from some representatives from the Homelessness Alliance. So if I can just check that this is correct. So in very general terms, these alliances were established in 2021. And they are effectively a governance structure to bring together various service providers domestic family violence and homelessness services, so they're operating under an alliance. And there's one specialist, domestic family violence statewide alliance.
Maria Hagias:
State-wide? Yes.

Katie-Jane Orr:
and there's four General Homelessness geographically based alliances and so just to give some context, Women's Safety Services or WSSSA is a member of the Domestic Family Violence Safety Alliance. Yes. So these funding issues you're talking about are applicable in that sector and in that context.
Maria Hagias:
Absolutely. And actually to also add to the funding, when the alliances were established $250,000, which might not sound a lot to people but it's quite a lot for our sector, was actually taken from the bucket of DFV money to set up the alliance infrastructure, which again burdened the system.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Commissioner, I have no further questions.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
We're not done yet, I'm afraid. I have a few if I may, Ms Hagias. I just wanted to drill down on some of the restrictions or the difficulties with the eligibility criteria.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
… being based around homelessness. Reading in submissions, a number of them, including ones with which you've been associated, something like couchsurfing would mean that you were not necessarily considered homeless. Could you just talk through some of the examples that might preclude services being provided to people who might need them to people who might need them?
Maria Hagias:
So ask me that question.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
So in terms of the eligibility criteria, being homeless...
Maria Hagias:
Yeah.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
even if, you know, what are the things, the barriers that would prevent someone getting the support that they need because they're technically not homeless?
Maria Hagias:
They're not homeless.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Yeah, that's fine.
Maria Hagias:
I think, and please, I can take this on notice, there's also the criteria required through South Australian Housing Trust as well, who provide the emergency accommodation programme. I believe that if somebody's couch surfing or has sort of somewhere to live which is not appropriate, would not be considered homeless at that point.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
What if you've got a car?
Maria Hagias:
No, a car would, from our perspective, it would actually not mean, it would mean they're homeless.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Those people that don't technically meet that criteria, what happens, where did they, because this seems to be a gap in terms of the eligibility for those services and therefore they are falling through.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
That's what would happen given, I know that some submissions have talked about the need for specialist DV services that don't necessarily, are not linked to homelessness per se.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah. The criteria, and I think, again, I go back to, and the Alliance probably would have answers on that, is that for us, interestingly, when we talk about imminent risk and homelessness, it is also tied to what Housing SA will, and their eligibility criteria around the Emergency Assistance programme, around the Assistance programme. And as part of that process, there's a whole lot of requirements that would be considered mutual obligation, right? And I – and please, Commissioner, I don't know the ins and outs of that, but I know that from the team that I – from our team that I talk to, there is a lot of frustration around particularly for women around that mutual obligations requirement. Whether it be requirements on how many properties women need to have used in order to continue and to meet the eligibility criteria, but to also add a point of needing to pay motel accommodation.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO
Yep.
Maria Hagias:
And as we know, particularly for women who are experiencing, well, I'm talking about our sector and our group, is that there are real challenges around the mutual obligation when women and children are coming into and going into motel accommodation. Necessarily, they might not have finances at that point. Even if they do, these types of accommodation are not set up for cooking or facilities that could support them to purchase food and cook. So a lot of food costs money because they're ordering takeaway in order to feed their families and their children. And then alongside that, and let's remember, there's trauma, there's a whole lot of stuff that's going on, and then we're putting pressure on them around some mutual obligation stuff. And at what point that happens, I can't answer that. I'm not saying it happens as soon as women come in, let's be very clear, that doesn't. But they are some of the pressures, particularly when our system can not move women outside of motels into shelter quick enough, and we have women who could be there for a very long time.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
So, put simply, you in terms of that supply and demand to which you refer, specifically in relation to shelters or emergency accommodation, there's just a shortage of facilities, of rental accommodations.
Maria Hagias:
Yes, emergency accommodation.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
and you've explained some of the inadequacy.

Maria Hagias:
And the costs. And the reality is that actually, when your system, you know, when your system doesn't have those robust, you know, really early intervention and prevention programmes, right, and there's nowhere for somebody to go to start that process earlier, well, what happens is, is they're going to enter that system, they're going to come out as soon as the crisis hits. Do you know what I mean? So if you don't do that, eventually those people that you might have been able to capture at that front end will eventually end up in crisis. And that puts more burden on the system. Not a burden, sorry, I shouldn't say that word, that puts pressure on the system.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Can I have one more question, Counsel Assisting, about perpetrator accommodation or accommodation for those people who use violence? There's a distinct shortage, we're being told, or is there almost a complete lack of?...
Maria Hagias:
Yeah, I'm not sure how many properties were out of that 120 stimulus properties. Louise will probably be able to talk to add a little bit more.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
And I am assuming OARS will be able to speak to that as well?
Maria Hagias:
Thank you. Yeah. Will be able to talk to that a bit more.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Do you have any recommendations or views on what would be appropriate accommodation for those people perpetuating violence?
Maria Hagias:
I think what we need to do is have a system that provides options, and it goes back to, you know, of course, having housing where women can remain in their own home, of course, is what we would like to see, is women remaining in their home safely. But we do also know that that may never be an option for some women, just because of the nature of it. So we need a system that has a variety of responses, which includes perpetrator housing.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
In terms of women staying, primarily women and children being able to stay in the home, I know that there's been some discussion around the Safe at Home programme. That would be my final question, if you've got any comments.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah, the Safe at Home programme is also part of the Alliance and I think, again, it goes back to the differing options of services that we need to provide. It is a programme that actually really works quite well in women remaining in their homes safely through practical measures, you know, of security systems or whatever that looks like. But also alongside that, that I think that's critical in any measure that we put in place, we need to ensure that we have the right specialist support that supports those women to continue their journey towards safety and really free of violence because it's not just about putting up duress alarms and security systems, how are we supporting, but this is not only on the homelessness sector, but generally, how does legislation support, how do we provide services to those families and those women.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Can I just ask one more thing to follow up? I'm sorry, when you say that's specialist support, can you give some examples about the type of support that you're talking about?
Maria Hagias:
For women who are living in their home?
Katie-Jane Orr:
You were talking about safe at home, but I think, as I understand applies generally across the board.
Maria Hagias:
Yeah, I think in any, you know, in any initiative that we provide alongside that we should be providing the appropriate specialist support that continues to support that woman in risk safety management. Risk changes, you know, we've got to remember that. You know, it's not, you know, it could be low today, go high tomorrow. So it is really critical that we provide that support for that family, that woman, during that period to address, mitigate risk, you know, understand safety measures, address trauma, the supports that are required not only at that moment but also remembering the trauma and the impact that violence has had on that family. So it's that short-term support and long-term support. You know I don't advocate that the homelessness sector or the DFV sector is the be-all and end-all. We are a moment in time for that family and what we need to do is make sure that we have the systems around to support that family as they continue on their journey.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
I have no further questions. I was just going to say in terms of risk, finally assessing risk.
Do you use the sort of standard risk assessment tool?
Maria Hagias:
Yeah.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
And is that something that you found adequate in order to determine?
Maria Hagias:
Yeah, we have and also with the coercive control I believe there's been a review of that as well so it is the standard tool. And I think I do want to sort of just say to that is that these are some of the things that South Australia's done really well, you know, the risk assessment tool, the information sharing guidelines that I think were in 2004, you know, those measures have really meant that the work that we do then that we didn't do many years ago was the sharing of information between services that helped us understand risk. You know, there's information that we might have that police don't have, that police have that we don't have, you know, or services. And that really provides us, I think SA has done really good on some of those initiatives, family safety framework. But it's building on them. You're learning and you build on some of those initiatives and pivot to meet the needs of the community. And ensuring that those people that are experiencing violence, that I think we could do better, is having a voice in the systems.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I'd ask the witness be excused.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Miss Hagias, you're free to go. Thank you.
Assisting Counsel, we're running ahead of time and we have a break before the next witness. Okay. I suggest that we take a break until the next witness, the panel at 11.15. Thank you.

Witnesses:
Panel discussion - Homelessness Alliance representatives

Katie-Jane Orr:
I will introduce the next witnesses.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Commissioner, the next, excuse me, the next evidence we will hear is from a panel of witnesses. I call Mishelle Di Pinto, Sandra Fuchs, Alice Worrell, Orla Matthews and Shaya Nettle.
Kerryn Hawkes:
I do 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.
Mishelle di Pinto:
I do truly and solemnly affirm.
Kerryn Hawkes:
Please say your full name.
Mishelle Di Pinto:
Mishelle Sian di Pinto.
Kerryn Hawkes:
Do you truly and solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give will be the truth of the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Say it as you truly and solemnly affirm.
Sandra Fuchs:
I do truly and solemnly affirm.
Kerryn Hawkes:
And please state your full name.
Sandra Lee:
Sandra Lee Fuchs
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.
Alice Worrall
I do truly and solemnly affirm
Kerryn Hawkes:
And please state your full name.
01:08:11 - 01:08:12] Alice Worrall:
Alice Worrall
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.
Orla Matthews:
I do truly and solemnly affirm.

Kerryn Hawkes:
Thank you, and please say your full name.
Orla Matthews:
Orla Matthews
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.
Shaya Nettle:
I do truly and solemnly affirm.
Kerryn Hawkes:
Thank you, and please say your full name.
Shaya Nettle:
Shaya Nettle
Katie-Jane Orr:
You can have a seat. Commissioner, these witnesses are the representatives of the five homelessness alliances in South Australia. Is it correct that each of you have effectively been nominated as a spokesperson for the alliance that you manage?
Katie-Jane Orr:
I'm going to ask each of you to introduce yourselves and the Alliance you are from.
Mishelle di Pinto:
I'm Mish di Pinto. I am on the ALT, so Alliance Leadership Team for the Statewide Domestic and Family Violence Safety Alliance.
Sandra Fuchs:
I'm Sandra Fuchs, the Alliance Senior Manager for Country North Homelessness Alliance.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and country north, which region does that cover?
Sandra Fuchs:
So country north and we cover the region from the Clare Valley right down the Yorke Peninsula across Port Augusta and far north and right across to the Western Australia border.
Alice Worrall:
I'm Alice Worrall, the Alliance Senior Manager for the Country South Homelessness Alliance. We cover the Riverland, Murraylands, Fleurieu, Kangaroo Island, right down to the Limestone Coast.
Orla Matthews:
I'm Orla Matthews, I'm the Alliance Senior Manager for the Adelaide North West Homelessness Alliance. We cover the West Torrens right up to Nuriootpa.
Shaya Nettle:
I'm Shaya Nettle, Alliance Senior Manager with the Toward Home Alliance. We cover the CBD, the inner and outer south down to Aldinga and the Adelaide Hills region.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So, is it correct we have a specialist domestic family violence alliance, which is statewide? We have two regional alliances and then we have two metro alliances. We've heard evidence this morning from Ms Maria Hagias in general terms about the domestic family violence and homelessness sector in South Australia. And we just covered off at the end that there are homelessness alliances in South Australia

which bring together service partners. And they are the alliances that we've just heard about. But I'm going to ask you to explain in a bit more detail about what the Alliance system is. Perhaps Ms Nettle, if you're happy to start, could you just tell the Commissioner and anyone who's listening about what this Alliance system is and means.

Shaya Nettle:

So the Alliance system is the result of a significant reform that commenced or was completed in July 2021. It's based on a UK model essentially focused on tackling socially wicked issues of which of course homelessness is one of those issues. The premise being a collaborative methodology for increasing transparency, shared decision making, risk management from a systems perspective and a service delivery perspective is in the best interest of clients and community. So for South Australia that meant consolidating 75 individual services into the five alliances that you see here now. We represent collectively approximately 56 million dollars of services every year.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Is there much difference across, I'll leave you Ms Di Pinto to one side as a specialist alliance, you're in a different category, but across the general alliances, is there much difference in the approach, Ms Nettle, are you able to help with that?

Shaya Nettle:

So, the alliance model itself provides a structure, if you like, for ensuring that we are, as an alliance, seeing the system from a holistic perspective. That means within each individual alliance, we can see what's happening across our region, within different parts of the community, across the spectrum of homelessness. What we do know is that the two Metropolitan Alliances obviously benefit from the proximity and capacity to share infrastructure, sites in a way, bring workforce together and collaboration. So what we've seen evolve over the last three years is the two Metropolitan Alliances service models have become quite similar and consistent if you like across the two metro regions. I can't speak on behalf of the country alliances, but I understand from my colleagues that the alliancing model plays out slightly differently, however the principles of collaboration, shared decision making, collective accountability, viewing the ecosystem as a collaboration and innovating and making decisions in the best interest of client and community still occurs in those two alliances.

Katie-Jane Orr:

I understand that each Alliance has their own service model and you're saying that the two Metro Alliances work quite similarly in their models, is that correct? Yes. And what about from a regional perspective, Ms Fuchs, can you help us with that?

Sandra Fuchs:

Yes, sure. So there's quite a lot of similarities between all of the alliances. We all share the same governance structures. We all have an alliance leadership team that Mish referred to earlier, which act like the board of an alliance. The alliance senior managers sit in the middle and are responsible for coordinating and overseeing the system from a whole of sector perspective, and then we have the Alliance Management Team, which is a lot more operational. So the Alliance Leadership and Management Teams for us in the country, and it is the same across all alliances, are representatives of each of the services participants, along with the funding body.

Where I think for us in the region we differ slightly from the City Alliances is that our services are much more localised and so where the City Alliances might provide targeted approaches or specific areas, support for people in their journey through and out of homelessness. For us in the regions, we're much more localised and so each service provider would provide support from early intervention and prevention right through homelessness support provision and into exit into housing and so in that way I think our services are more localised but responsive to community need and not that the others aren't responsive to community need but we're a little bit more siloed in our approaches than the city alliances.

Katie-Jane Orr:
I think you've explained this, but do we effectively have a situation where rather than each of the service providers in this sector governing, representing, working for themselves, this model brings those services together with a focus point or a..

Sandra Fuchs:
Absolutely, and like the reference that Shaya made earlier, all services work together, we build consistency, our service delivery is similar right across the board even though we might have nuances that are required for each of our local areas, the actual service delivery is the same, we work collaboratively, the whole alliance model is built on transparency and at the end of the day it is all about what is the best outcome for the person experiencing homelessness regardless of where they're located.

Katie-Jane Orr:
I just want to touch on funding very briefly, but is it correct that the alliances are funded by the Commonwealth National Social Housing and Homelessness Plan, known as the NAP? Everyone's nodding. And then your alliances are responsible for distributing that funding to the service partners within your alliances. Is that correct? Yes. Now, Ms Di Pinto, you represent the Domestic and Family Violence Safety Alliance, which sits a bit separately from the other four. Can you tell the Commission about that alliance?

Mishelle di Pinto:
So essentially we are quite unique in that we are a state-wide alliance, so the partners are quite spread out, it does, it can make it a little bit more difficult with building relationships in the sense that the majority of those meetings would then be held not face-to-face. But I feel like as a sector, the domestic violence sector has been something that has it's had to be quite collaborative, even previous to the Alliance. I do feel, though, as an alliance, that there is strength in having those numbers across our state and seeing how women are, or people are affected by domestic violence across our state.

Katie-Jane Orr How many service partners does your alliance have?

Mishelle di Pinto: So there are 18, essentially 18 organisations within that organisation, within the Alliance, but covered off by a smaller amount obviously because there are a lot of programmes across our state.

Katie-Jane Orr:
And we've said that, or we've heard that your alliance is a specialist domestic family violence alliance. So what does that mean?

Mishelle di Pinto:
So what that means is that essentially, even though we are funded as a homelessness service or under homelessness funding, we have a safety first response that is required for supporting women and children or people experiencing domestic and family violence. So essentially what we're saying is that people require a safety first response. However, homelessness essentially is where our funding sits. So it looks a little bit different for us when we're responding to a crisis because essentially we're a crisis response.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So is it correct that your focus is on domestic family violence or the presenting issue of your clients is domestic family violence? As opposed to homelessness?
Mishelle di Pinto:
as opposed to homelessness
Katie-Jane Orr:
Now you mentioned the word crisis and so I think you said that your alliance is a crisis response and what do you mean by that?
Mishelle di Pinto:
So we provide a safety first response which is a crisis first. Essentially we are not funded for early intervention or prevention. So if somebody doesn't fit that crisis response and their risk isn't, they're not at risk of homelessness, essentially they would not be provided a response, they would be provided a response by a homelessness service rather than a domestic violence service.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So I just want to ask you a bit more about that. You said if they're at high risk, do you mean high risk in a domestic family violence sense? How is that assessed?
Mishelle Di Pinto:
Yes, so that's assessed with a domestic violence risk assessment tool, that's a state-wide tool, and essentially each person that presents at a service is risk assessed and then can be referred through to things like the Family Safety Framework, depending on their risk, and that is assessed in a specialist, you know, with a specialist knowledge of domestic violence. So if that, they are not assessed as high risk, essentially they are not being provided a response, a specialist response by Domestic and Family Violence Service and they would then generally be referred on to a Homelessness Service for a further assessment. We do assess risk of homelessness within our sector, however if they are not at high risk of homelessness essentially they would be referred on to a Homelessness Service. So they're not getting a specialist response in that place, even though they get a response, it's not a specialist response.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I think you said high risk of homelessness. Did you mean high risk of domestic violence?
Mishelle di Pinto:
Sorry, I do mean high risk of domestic violence.
Katie-Jane Orr: And that's in accordance with this risk assessment? That's right. Is it correct, please correct me if I'm wrong, but when you're saying high risk, the test is that they're at high risk of serious harm or death?
Mishelle di Pinto That's exactly right.

Katie-Jane Orr: And that's assessed by experts or social workers or people that have the expertise to make that assessment in accordance with the DV risk assessment tool?
Mishelle di Pinto That's right, the specialists.
Katie-Jane Orr: And then you said if they sit outside that high-risk crisis response, then they will be referred to the general homelessness alliances who are sitting here today.
Mishelle di Pinto:
I think, may I make a comment too, it's important to note that women, when they present it, they may minimise what's been happening for them and if this is the first time that they are actually coming forth, that if they are not providing the information, which can take trust and time to build, essentially they would be assessed as not being at risk and would be referred on and this may be the only time that they reach out, so they may then be lost to the system and essentially then still be experiencing this.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I will come back a bit later to some of the effects of these strict criteria. You have said, and I just want to make it clear, that there is also an eligibility element of at risk of or experiencing homelessness, which is connected to that funding that we've spoken about. Yes. Just while we're explaining how your alliance works, Ms Di Pinto, can I also raise the domestic violence crisis line? We heard a little bit about that from Ms Hagias who was our first witness this morning. Is that crisis line managed through your alliance?
Mishelle Di Pinto:
It is, it's managed through Women's Safety Services of SA and through our alliance and it is a state-wide response essentially and what I'm sure you've already heard is that the level of demand far exceeds what we are capable of providing services to.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Yes, we have heard that.
Mishelle di Pinto:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Is it correct that that is, that phone line is the entry point, the one entry point now into the Domestic Family Violence Alliance system? That's correct. Yes. It's a 24-7 phone service? It is. But we've heard this morning that not all calls are answered due to demand. I will come back to that phone line in a moment. So it's apparent from what you've been saying that while you are the specialist domestic family violence alliance, or you represent the services within that, that are the specialist domestic family violence services, all of the alliances have clients who are experiencing domestic family violence, is that correct?
Mishelle di Pinto:
That's correct, yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Perhaps Ms Matthews, if I can ask you, just to explain a bit about, I think Ms Di Pinto has probably covered some of it, but your dealings with domestic family violence clients in the context of being a homelessness alliance.

Orla Matthews:
I think the answer is twofold. We often have people who present to our alliance and frame their experience in the context of housing, or lack thereof, which means the presenting issue was captured as experiencing homelessness. What we find sometimes through our assessments is that the presenting issue, or the homelessness, the experience of homelessness is as a result of domestic and family violence. We then, the practise approach is then that we work through the needs and potentially either continue to support that family or refer on to the Domestic and Family Safety Violence Alliance. The other lens at which we receive referrals are people who identify that they're experiencing domestic and family violence and are homeless as a result of that, but they haven't met the threshold of the Domestic and Family Violence and Safety Alliance and have been advised to contact our service, so we respond in both instances.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And that's the situation that Ms Di Pinto was describing? Can I just go back to the first scenario that you gave? You said someone might present because the need is homelessness, and then it becomes apparent through your assessments that it's due to domestic family violence. And then you said we may refer them to other domestic family violence services. How is that assessment made?
Orla Matthews:
So we also use the DVRA risk assessment as well, if and when the presenting issue of domestic violence is known and shared. Depending on the risk score that is returned, we know what the DV Alliance threshold is, so that will constitute a referral or not. But like most of our clients who experience either homelessness or domestic violence, I can't stress enough that the story and the nuances and the complexity of what they're sharing doesn't often result in a clear score, so there's a real need for people on the front line to have relationships and partnerships with the Domestic and Family Violence Alliance and also other services who respond to people experiencing Domestic and Family Violence Alliance to ensure that the response that the client needs is appropriate, so they don't fall through the system.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And is it also correct that that risk can change quite quickly depending on circumstances?
Orla Matthews:
Yeah an example I can give is if a family has fled interstate and the perpetrator is currently located interstate, a family might share with us that she knows that the perpetrator is on his way to, for example, Adelaide and we would assess her as really the need is pretty high in our world. She is experiencing homelessness obviously because that's criteria that our clients need to meet for our services. But the DFV Alliance would not in practise see that as high risk of death or harm because he is not physically in the location where she is. So client story and truth is really important in how we respond to need. But that is an example of where we would be really keeping a close eye on the shift in risk because as soon as he arrives, for example in the state, that risk then may warrant a referral to the Domestic Violence Safety Alliance.

Katie-Jane Orr:
You mentioned something then that I just want to pick up on. You said we do support people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. So is it correct that the four Homelessness Alliances have that test for eligibility? Yes. That your clients must be at risk of or experiencing homelessness? Yes. How is that assessed? Ms Matthews, if you're happy to go on?.
Orla Matthews:
Sure. So our Alliance assesses that through a risk assessment tool, but it's also a tool that allows clients really to share their storey and identify what their own strengths and challenges are. We really focus on the drivers of homelessness, but also the risk of homelessness occurring. So for example, we may respond to the needs of people who know that they will be experiencing homelessness because a private landlord might be selling a property and they know that there is an end date and they have endeavoured to try and source alternative accommodation for a significant period of time and have been unable to do so and they would qualify for like a preventative homelessness response and we obviously have people who articulate to us and share their storeys and say that they have nowhere to stay tonight and depending on the circumstances of the family unit and we would obviously advocate for crisis accommodation. If it's a young person we'd also explore crisis accommodation options as well. We do have a lot of people in the homelessness system who have shelter but not a home. So what that means in practise is someone may be couchsurfing at a friend's house or staying in temporary accommodation that is at risk at any time. So the spectrum is pretty broad but if and when there is no evidence of safe and secure, stable accommodation, they essentially fall into the bracket of at risk of experiencing homelessness.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I will come back to the services you provide in a moment, but is it correct that the assessment and the services you provide are affected by need, resources, triaging?
Orla Matthews:
Absolutely, but I think that would probably be in line with every community service system ever.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And on that note, Ms Di Pinto, I should have asked you, we heard from Ms Hagias this morning that this crisis response that you have described has come about because of a tightening of resources. So the limitations have come about due to the demand.
Mishelle di Pinto:
That's correct.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I just want to stay with the General Homelessness Alliances for a moment and ask about your dealings with clients who are experiencing domestic family violence, and perhaps Ms Worrall if I can ask you now, but as far as the skill set of the people working in your service providers goes, does that provide challenges in dealing with domestic family violence clients?
Alice Worrall:
I mean, again, it's quite a nuanced question. Obviously, it comes down to the individual situation. Housing availability and affordability is a leading cause of

homelessness, as well as a range of driving factors, and it's not uncommon for homelessness services to work with people who have had potentially lack of services from other sectors, such as mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and domestic and family violence being one of them. So, as such, I think our teams are quite multidisciplinary in terms of having different skill sets and we really do assess the need of an individual holistically and based on what their current circumstances are.

Katie-Jane Orr:

We've heard. I think it might have been in the Alliance's submission that there might be a lack of skills or confidence in frontline workers in dealing with domestic family violence because it's not that special. I appreciate what you're saying about it being a generalised service so they don't have those specialised skills.

Alice Worrall:

I think as Ms Matthews touched on, we do use the Domestic Family Violence Risk Assessment which is a common tool across the state. In instances where the domestic family violence is high risk and the person is at imminent risk, then perhaps it would be a more appropriate response for a specialist DV.

Katie-Jane Orr:

So it's... And how about in a regional setting, how does being in a regional setting, if either of you could help affect the workforce and the skill set?

Alice Worrall:

I'm happy to start. It's not uncommon in regional settings for domestic family violence in homes and services to be co-located and at times delivered by the same organisation. I think there are some strengths in that. Like Mish mentioned, it is very much around partnerships. So I think that is a strength area. I think another complexity sometimes is just around staffing and levels of staffing in regional areas. We do at times experience challenges in managing conflicts of interest and confidentiality, particularly when a homelessness service is working with both a victim-survivor and potentially the alleged perpetrator of abuse.

Sandra Fuchs:

I think our experiences would be similar and I think reflecting on our contract region, I think Port Lincoln is the only space that we have where the services aren't co-located and managed by the same organisation and so just like was said there, there is a real strength in that and ability for the teams to work closely together and where the risk becomes increased, there is that reference point and ability to either co-case manage or to seek guidance from your, you know, fellow team members who might be sitting nearby. I think in a regional setting when we're looking at developing the skill set and experiences of our frontline staff it is a little bit more difficult. We've talked about providing quite generalist support services and we do have a minimum requirements of training that staff would attend and part of that is around developing the skill and ability to undertake a diversity violence risk assessment tool and understanding how that might be applied, you know, training in approaches to, you know, how you might respond to a person who discloses that they are either at risk or being impacted by the presence of violence. I think where it becomes a little bit more challenging is having access to training opportunities and the opportunities to develop the more specialised skill set that perhaps a person working in the domestic violence service would have.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Thank you. Just on the skill set, I understand from your submission that the two metro alliances have actually developed dedicated domestic and family violence support programmes as a result of this demand. Is that correct? Could you each? I don't mind who goes first. Explain those programmes that you're offering.
Shaya Nettle:
Thank you. So in Toward Home Alliance context, we launched Right Place about 18 months ago. So Right Place is a short-term accommodation site for women, initially it was for women over the age of 45, because it was essentially funded through the Alliance, so we reallocated existing funding in response to this growing need and large system gap, and with the generosity of one of our partners, Baptist Care SA, to make the building available at no cost. So it was a very unique response. The response is 10 rooms, they each have their own en suite, their own window, a shared living space and kitchen space. And what we found once we launched the pilot was that 90 % of the women who access the service have experienced domestic and family violence and in some cases, repeat and very high levels of domestic and family violence. So we developed this service in response to the need in our system and the lack of options for women experiencing DV. There was also, thorough consultation with women, the notion around the need to come together, the power of healing together through sharing stories. And in our evaluation, which I'm happy to provide a copy of, that was a very significant theme. Within the first 12 months, 19 out of the 24 women who accessed the service went on to secure long-term accommodation with supports in place there. So it's a, as I said, that is in response to the limitations across both the homelessness and the domestic and family violence system.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Ms Matthews?
Orla Matthews
So similar to Shaya, we had anecdotally heard from staff on the front line that women were becoming an increased population in our region, but also the unmet need around housing options for families experiencing domestic and family violence. As a result of that, we did a deeper dive into the data, and essentially found that to be true. So one of our partners, Anglicare SA, say, worked really closely with some very generous philanthropists and we were able to secure funding for essentially, I think, accumulatively between eight and ten properties, which then became our Turning Point Programme and our Haven Programme. Eligibility criteria was families experiencing domestic violence and what we found on the front line was that that threshold of not quite at risk enough for domestic and family violence because it came the sub-population. I need to reinforce that we didn't find historical domestic violence to be a theme within this population, it was experiencing domestic and family violence. So as a result of that, yeah, we were able to house a number of families through the programme quite successfully Similarly, similar to Shaya's experience in Toward Home, the theme of healing was really, really dominant and the security of tenure was incredibly dominant in all instances.

Katie-Jane Orr:
So in each of your cases you are adopting, adapting sorry, the services you provide to meet the needs of these domestic family violence clients as best you've been able to.
Orla Matthews:
And as part of our alliance, we make conscious decisions around where we allocate our human resources. So even though our two projects were heavily funded through philanthropy, there ultimately is a decision that our alliance will make around how we provide the ongoing case management to programmes such as Haven and Turning Point. And that funding comes from, essentially, homelessness funding.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I want to turn to resourcing now, and perhaps starting with you Ms Di Pinto. So we heard this morning about, and I just mentioned it before as well, about the demand on services and the corresponding tightening eligibility criteria. So I take it from your evidence that resourcing is an issue for your alliance. Can you tell us about that?
Mishelle Di Pinto:
Yeah, and I think, just taking from what Orla was describing, we have a statewide Domestic and Family Violence Safety Alliance that essentially is not equipped or funded appropriately enough to be able to cover the supports that need to be provided for women who experience domestic violence, which then means that they're not being provided a specialist service. Essentially, they're being provided a homeless response. and even though that may be an appropriate response, it's not a specialist response and I think that it's, you know, the key word there is appropriate. They're providing, you know, being provided. It may be a housing outcome or, but they're not being provided a specialist domestic and family violence response. So resourcing is an issue and I think that's something that we recognise across our alliance is that it being statewide can create some of those issues we've heard about regionally to get the level of expertise needed to have people working in regional areas can be quite difficult. When we're talking about not being funded appropriately and having barriers in place around longer term funding and what that looks like, if we're looking to have people work in our regions, people that have that feminist lens that understand domestic violence at its core and the drivers of domestic violence, if we're not funded appropriately to be able to have staff that will come in and stay for the longer term and build those relationships within our community with other services, that is really difficult. And I think it's really important to note that these women, they deserve a specialist response. They deserve someone that understands the drivers of domestic violence, that works from a feminist lens, that understands essentially that when a woman presents she may not be telling you all that she needs to tell you. She may be at risk of homelessness due to DV, but may not fit the threshold simply because we can't provide a service if we're not funded appropriately to do so.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I've heard it described as your crisis response is the very tip or the pointy end of people experiencing domestic and family violence and then anything beyond that is outside of your ability to service. So can I take it from what you're saying that you don't have any capacity to provide an early intervention response or a prevention response.

Mishelle di Pinto:
That's correct, and unfortunately what that means is that we're not working in a space where when women are presenting to services where it may be that they are starting to think about leaving, if they essentially don't fit that pointy end, they are then being referred on as a homelessness response rather than a specialist DV response.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Before moving on to the other witnesses, I'd like to ask you about the domestic violence crisis line. So I asked you about that earlier, and we also heard a bit from Ms Hagias about that this morning. We heard some statistics this morning about, to illustrate the demand on that crisis line, which I don't need to repeat, but I just did want to ask you, are there restrictions around who can access that crisis line?
Mishelle Di Pinto:
Yes, so essentially that is women and adult women only that are able to access that response. So that is not, men and younger women are not, do not fit the criteria essentially.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And given that that is the entry point into the specialist domestic violence alliance, does that mean that children and men are outside of the services that you are able to provide? That's correct. If I can ask the representatives of the other alliances now, we've heard that there's no capacity to provide an early intervention or a prevention response from the Domestic Family Violence Alliance. Is that the case across the board when dealing with domestic family violence clients? Or is anyone able to provide broader services to those clients?
Alice Worrall:
I think, you know, the eligibility for our services is at risk of experiencing homelessness. So I'd say that most commonly when someone does present to our service having an experience of domestic and family violence, they're probably also experiencing homelessness at the same time. So potentially it's beyond that early intervention.
Sandra Fuchs:
I can talk to our alliance, we also within our homelessness service have a specialist men's counsellor and so his role is around working with male perpetrators of violence and so even though that position is located in our general homelessness service, the role is to focus and provide support predominantly to males who are perpetrators of violence but also males who are victims of violence as well.
Katie-Jane Orr:
We've heard a bit about holistic or wraparound responses and I think Ms Matthews you were explaining a bit about that earlier. Can anyone explain a bit more about the importance of a holistic or wraparound response for people who are experiencing domestic and family violence in the context of your homelessness response?
Orla Matthews:
I'm happy to give it a go. Holistic means the whole person. So we recognise as service providers that housing is a component of a client's experiences as to why they reach out for a service response. We know that the drivers of homelessness are largely housing affordability but they're also largely as a result of other systems not being able to adequately support the sustainment of a family in the home. How that

translates to in practise for example is we have some clients who cannot sustain a tenancy because their mental health is deteriorating and that there's a service gap there to support wellness and wellness equates to sustaining housing. To Alice's earlier point around the multi-d approach that we take to providing support to people experiencing homelessness, what that means is we are working with people who have experienced poor mental health, poor health outcomes, alcohol and other drugs challenges, financial instability, all drivers of poverty, all as a result of poverty. We also work with people who have been involved in the Corrections system, we work with young people who have been involved in the Department of Child Protection system and we also work with people who have and are presenting with domestic and family violence is the driver of homelessness so we do as experts of the housing and homelessness system need to have core skills and competencies that enable us to respond to those broad needs of the people that we see and we also need to lean on and we need to lean on the service system more broadly to better understand the experience of our families and people experiencing homelessness so for example clients who may have touched or have been engaged with our system more than once and by doing things like simply asking the question of what would have worked for you the last time. So while our lens is housing and homelessness so the end the experience of homelessness, you know you do need safe and secure accommodation, but to thrive in a community means that we need to address the holistic needs of a person, which include all the things I've just said. I will also just add that the lens of being engaged in a community and education, employment, all of those things, particularly for our young people, is so important to prevent homelessness from reoccurring again. So the work is pretty complex, but when we talk about holistic, we're not just responding to the housing crisis or the eviction or the rough episode of rough sleeping, we are responding to the needs of the whole person that aims to prevent them from experiencing homelessness again.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And I assume that resourcing is a factor in the level of holistic service that you are able to provide.

Orla Matthews:

Always. But I also acknowledge that housing is a driver in there as well. So for example, our allowance responded to over 6,000 individual clients last year. We know that we don't have 6,000 homes available for people. So by virtue of the maths, we can make the assumption or draw the conclusions that we're limited in our ability to respond to the holistic needs of people experiencing homelessness when housing is often not available.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Well, thank you, because that is the perfect lead into my next question, which was, and perhaps Ms Nettle, if I could ask you, we know that in Australia, but for our purposes in South Australia, there are issues with the availability of housing and accommodation. How is that affecting you and the work that you do?

Shaya Nettle:

So, I think as a sector, there's general consensus that the housing crisis, it's never been quite this severe. And the primary reason for that, outside of the declining social housing stock that we've seen in every state, including South Australia, it's because the private rental market is no longer available for so many of the families

that we support. So, I think we're actually at a point of time where there's a huge system shift happening at this point in time that is going to see a change in the composition of our communities wholesale. So, in our region, for example, the traditionally affordable communities like Hackham, like Noarlunga, private rentals in some cases have doubled in those communities, literally dislocating families who have been there with kids attached to school, supports in place, forcing them to move out of those communities. What we're also seeing is the traditional sort of red flags around at-risk tenancies are catching people off guard. So once upon a time, we know people expect that, well, the market's tough but we'll be able to get another private rental property. What we know now is a sense of double-income families, lifelong private renters in our communities now needing to enter the homelessness system. So this has many flow-on effects, it'll have flow-on effects to how communities develop, how children stay attached to school, but it's also really impacting crisis situations. So I heard an example just recently where a mother and her two children who had been experiencing domestic and family violence, we were supporting them in a motel accommodation for six months. In that time we were supporting them to explore all of their exit pathways of which in her mind, in the mother's mind, private rental was the most realistic one. After that period of six months she made a decision to return to the perpetrator because she didn't believe she would be able to secure a private rental property on her own. So what we know is with a single mother with one or two children are largely priced out of private rentals almost across the state now. So we expect at this point in time the narrative is still developing but over the next two, three, four, five years we will see a very big shift across our communities and rough sleeping which is what is most visible in our communities now that's increased 60-70 % in most of the areas that we are working in over the last two and a half years and the reason for people coming into the homelessness system being housing affordability that is also doubled. So people are now coming into the homelessness system for different reasons that they were two or three years ago.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And then I imagine that that is putting an extra strain. It's exacerbating the problem because there's fewer properties.

Shaya Nettle:

It really is. There was a Homelessness Australia report released on Monday that looked at this nationally across all homelessness services and basically it told a story of almost daily triaging of need and vulnerability. So in the same way that we've heard Mish talk about being at the pointy end of the iceberg and crisis responses, we are unable to say no. We're not a system where we can turn people away because we are full. That that means that as a collective set of services, we are having to really grapple with this challenge of knowing every person who seeks a service from us deserves to get one. But with a resource perspective across our alliances, demand has increased something like 40 or 50 % over the last three years. Net funding has reduced across homelessness services also. So there's a real bottleneck where our systems are at now but most concerningly it will be how this plays out in the next four or five years that I believe the function and composition of our communities will look quite different.

Katie-Jane Orr:
I'm just going to sort of step back a bit, thank you, through what you've said, but if we can start with crisis accommodation, I'm taking from what you've said, there's not enough places for people to go, perhaps Ms Worrall, if you could explain to us, what are your options when there are not enough crisis accommodation homes?
Alice Worrall:
From a country-south perspective, obviously the availability of crisis accommodation differs from location to location, but it's not uncommon for there not to be crisis accommodation available. In a homelessness perspective, we are probably heavily reliant on private motels and caravan parks that are used through the Emergency Accommodation programme. In regional areas and especially high tourist destinations, there can be periods throughout the year where the private options are just not available. It's not uncommon for people to be accommodated Monday to Friday and then be asked to leave that accommodation over the weekend. In terms of domestic and family violence specifically, the Fleurieu is a great example where there is no domestic and family violence specific crisis or housing accommodations available. So there is no shelter, there's no transitional supported housing either. So, you know, I guess consequently we see quite a higher proportion of people experiencing domestic and family violence in the homelessness service because the domestic and family violence service doesn't have those accommodation options available to them.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Ms Fuchs, you're experiencing the same?
Sandra Fuchs:
Very similar. We have large regions in our footprint where there is no crisis accommodation available. I think in the smaller communities and particularly for us a number of our towns, you know Port Pirie, Whyalla, Port Augusta for example, have large industry and so the crisis accommodation or the emergency accommodation that may be available is really impacted quite easily when there might be an industrial infrastructure project happening. So for example if the smelters in Port Pirie have a shutdown, that will wipe out all of the cabin parks. parks, motels, not just in Port Pirie but the whole of the region around and so it's not uncommon for us to not be able to access any emergency or crisis accommodation. I think the other two points I'd like to make is quite often crisis accommodation where it is available has been made available through the individual organisations where they've invested and purchased properties to make available for all sorts of crisis accommodation, whether that be young people, single men's shelters or for women and families experiencing domestic violence. And I think the other challenge that we have and particularly this is more noticeable over in Ceduna, some of the emergency or crisis accommodation that previously was available, so you know I can think of there was a cabin park but also an older hotel has been purchased by the local motel and the aged care facilities over there to be able to house their staffing and so in places like Ceduna where the availability of appropriate staff and employees is not available, people come into the communities to work and so what may previously have been accommodation spaces for people experiencing homelessness or domestic violence has been taken for people in the town to work. And so, you know, quite often it's a really terrible thing to say that sometimes for some families experiencing

homelessness the only response that we might have is to offer a tent or a swag, you know, and that's the best that we can do. And I'm well aware of families, particularly one family comes to mind seeking to support and seeking to leave a violent relationship, only to find that there is no crisis or emergency accommodation available and so being left with the options of remaining in their car with family or returning to the perpetrator and in this case the family chose to return home.

Katie-Jane Orr:

I don't need to ask the question about whether that or the effect that that has on someone trying to escape family violence, but perhaps if I can ask from the Metro Alliances, do you have difficulties with, I know I've spoken about the access to accommodation full stop, but how about the suitability of accommodation for people trying to escape domestic or family violence? Especially with children, I suppose is what I'm thinking of. Are there restrictions and difficulties around that?

Orla Matthews:

So the Housing Trust do fund and operate the Emergency Accommodation Programme. What that looks like on the ground is they commission a certain number of hotel motels to provide accommodation in crisis situations where eligibility criteria is met. So for a family who is presenting, regardless of whether or not they've experienced domestic or family violence or not, but at risk of experiencing homelessness, we would be absolutely assessing their eligibility for crisis accommodation in a hotel motel. I haven't visited all the motels that are available across Metro Adelaide but my understanding would be that they differ in size and from a safety perspective and what I mean by that is locations are known and I guess how they're run, managed, et cetera. For us, when a family comes to us and they are eligible and staying in a hotel motel or go in crisis accommodation, we would always be safety planning with the family anyway, and that includes that physical environment, so whatever that looks like. In particular, as to whether or not it's a known crisis response to someone experiencing homelessness.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Ms Nettle, you spoke about how the availability of private rentals or accommodation at the exit end of this system puts strain back through the system. Is that happening with transitional housing as well?

Shaya Nettle:

the entire system faces similar pressures and so the Emergency Accommodation programme that Orla just spoke on was developed some 10 or 12 years ago based on the assumption that the exit pathway was primarily private rentals. We know that's no longer the case. We know that maybe only 15 or 20 % of people in that programme exit into private rentals. The other are relying on some sort of community and public housing. So what that looks like for us as far as transitional and supported housing goes, all of the Alliance have access to a certain number of what's called supported housing packages or transitional housing properties. They are largely managed either by the South Australian Housing Trust or community housing providers and then we have nomination rights working with the families into those properties. I think it's a consistent experience across all of our programmes that again those programmes are designed to support people for approximately 12 to 18 months with the view that they'll exit into long-term stable accommodation. That has largely come to a standstill because of course once we know a family, the families

we've been talking about are able to access what's called an SHP or a THP, the transitional properties, their capacity to exit into a private rental property is very unlikely, which means again they stay stuck in the community or public housing system, which is absolutely at capacity. The only reflections I would say around the crisis accommodation, the very known gaps in that crisis accommodation to us are for Aboriginal families, Aboriginal families experiencing homelessness as well as domestic and family violence. So by default and unintentionally, the style of accommodation available means that we can at times compromise the very protective factors that support particularly Aboriginal families, but all families to move through that crisis such as having family stay, you know, being able to keep kids attached to school. All of the motels largely don't have kitchenettes so there might be a kettle or a microwave but nowhere to prepare food for kids. It's also extremely expensive to stay in a motel when you're having to get takeaways and rely on public transport or taxis to school. So the disruption process for families staying and emergency accommodation is problematic and the other two gaps of course are for male victims, survivors of domestic and family sexual violence, which is a very high gap in the system from our perspective, transgender people as well as a very significant gap both across crisis and transitional accommodation and young people, LGBTQIA+as well.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Perfectly you have led me to my next question again, and that was about some certain groups of people where there are service gaps. Could you explain, or maybe I can go back a step, we've heard that for entry into Ms di Pinto, your specialist alliance, it is for adult women only. So then for anyone outside that, we turn to the four of you, your services. And So Ms Nettle, could you tell us a bit more about why those gaps are there and the difficulties that are being faced? If you could just start with one group perhaps.

Shaya Nettle:

Sure, probably because it is Remembrance Day for trans people today as well, so I think it's probably appropriate that we start there, and it is a focus for us at the moment, because what we're finding, particularly in the crisis accommodation or homelessness context, is that most of the crisis accommodations, they're either for men or they're for women, with again unintentionally so little capacity to accommodate what safety looks and feels like and is appropriate for transgender people and so as a response for us, and there are a surprisingly large number of, we know that approximately 30 % of the LGBTQIA+ community and transgender people experience homelessness through their lifetime. Currently the mainstream services are not well equipped to deal with that. And what that looks like for our alliance, when we become aware of someone who is transgender experiencing homelessness, we will escalate our response there. So if they're in a male crisis facility, we will instantly look to prioritise how we can support them in a more private alternative accommodation option, either managed within our alliance or within the broader system. I think the primary concerns we hear there is a lack of, really it's primarily around safety and also a real need for all services across homelessness and DV to work with safe support services within the LGBTQIA+ community across the whole spectrum. As far as, happy for someone else to talk about young people...

Orla Matthews:
I'm happy to talk to the youth cohort, so what we see in our region is we are responding to the needs of young people who otherwise wouldn't be supported by other parts of the system, so domestic and family violence just being one component of that. What we hear from our young people is that how they frame their experiences isn't the same as adults, naturally, because their cognitive ability to articulate what they're going through looks and feels different because the brains aren't quite developed and so what we hear things like is I don't feel safe at home or when my mum's boyfriend is in the home I need to leave. So they're the stories of the young people that we hear about in our in our alliance and they will more often than not present as saying I need somewhere to stay as opposed to I do not feel safe. So what we really need to be really aware of in our initial assessments, particularly with young people when they present to services, is looking for those nuances where we need to unpack the story a little bit more, to ascertain how safe or not accommodation is or isn't. Reunification is a practise approach that we always explore with all of our young people in our region, but we have to be very mindful of how that young person experiences safety, because it's their story and their level of safety that is paramount to be addressed, as opposed to someone else's perception of that. We see, I think, the percentage of young people who identify violence in the broad sense as an issue is extremely high. It's over 80%. So we are responding to that and having to unpack that. What that looks like, it varies. It can be domestic and family violence, as I mentioned. It can be at times I have felt unsafe, et cetera, et cetera. I think with what we see and hear for young people is often when they touch our system, they've exhausted their couchsurfing options. It's getting to the point where I have cashed in all the favours from all the people that I know who I've ever had a positive experience with in my life, sometimes not so positive, and I'm now at a point where I have nowhere else to go. When we do things like eco maps and explore, so an eco map is where we look at the person and their family unit or support services or people in their lives and we find that there are more unsafe people than safe people and we then prioritise them and really support them to be able to access safe and secure accommodation. But again it's complex and because through that process we might learn that oh but my mum and my sister are actually in a hotel or motel or in crisis accommodation and I can't stay there because I'm 17. So….
Katie-Jane Orr:
I might pick up on that if you don't mind, but I might even turn to Ms Worrall.
That scenario that we've just heard, is that something that you are seeing with the adolescent not being able to stay with their parents?
Alice Worrall:
It's certainly an experience in the country south region of male adolescent children not being accepted in the core and cluster style domestic violence accommodation. Which means that young person I guess is a choice there in terms of they're either disconnected from their family and they're experiencing homelessness or the family make a decision not to enter that style of accommodation. It's I guess I'll add a layer of complexity in a regional perspective such as country South is there isn't any youth-specific crisis accommodation available within our homelessness services. So that young person then faces I guess couch surfing. It's very hard for someone under

18 to secure an independent tenancy so you know they face that or being disconnected from their community altogether and having to travel into a metro or another regional area to be able to access suitable safe accommodation.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Back to Metro, is there the same issue with availability of youth specific crisis accommodation?

Orla Matthews:

So through our Alliance funding we do fund 25 Youth Crisis Accommodation beds, and they're across the region. So we've got one located in Port Adelaide, one in Salisbury and one in Elizabeth. But absolutely that is a recurring theme around the presenting issue for young people.

Shaya Nottle:

The only thing I'd add to that, if I can, so we fund and operate approximately 32 beds across our region for young people, but a consistent message again is a couple of years ago an exit for a young person from a crisis or transitional accommodation option, a realistic exit was private rental, particularly when they're engaged. And that was a, from a young person's aspirations and looking forward into adulthood, that's really important to be able to cultivate that. I hear not just within our own alliance, but within youth services across the board, that again is no longer an option, which means those services are getting really stuck and again as a collective system we need to consider what that means, what realistic, independent living options look like for young people as they move into their 20s. And so I'm sure we all know our colleagues and friends who are now having to live and get a flatmate in or whatever just to afford private rental. For young people, I think we really need to look at those shared living options and recalibrate what growing into adulthood and independence looks like, particularly for young people with additional vulnerabilities or with other family and support networks like we've mentioned.

Orla Matthews:

Just to add to that as well, in youth crisis accommodation, a young person can have a birthday, ie. turn 18, and they'll no longer be eligible under the licencing agreement. So that is hugely problematic, because young people are often in school, year 12, it's a really important time in their life, or alternative education. And we endeavour not to disrupt that in order to holistically provide an appropriate service response. So hugely problematic and if we do want to advocate for a young person to stay when they're 18 and there's a process that needs to go to occur which means we need to escalate to the Department of Child Protection and get an exemption.

Sandra Fuchs:

I think when we're talking about youth and domestic violence in the context of crisis accommodation where young males are unable to stay, I think it would be a real struggle for a family or a mother and younger siblings, you know, faced with that choice, do I keep myself and my younger family safe in crisis accommodation and yet my son is unable to be with me and so, you know, facing that decision of remaining in the family home where the perpetrator and the presence of violence is still really current, or for occasions where we've just talked about here where the male is not able to stay in crisis accommodation, it might not be available anyway, and so having that choice that maybe they stay in the family home with the perpetrator, and you know, the level of risk for that young man, you know, is also

really a high presence and a high level of risk there for them as well.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And before, I think, Ms Nettle, you mentioned male victim survivors. Are we seeing the same issues? Absolutely. For the same reasons. And then finally, perhaps Ms Di Pinto, I can ask you, is there any availability of accommodation for people with a disability? I'm generalising, and I know that the type of housing that you're talking about, it depends on the disability.

Mishelle Di Pinto:

And it does, and I believe across our core and cluster sites that there is, there are some spaces where that is certainly an option, but when we're looking at motel-style accommodation then that certainly is not always available and then creates a barrier essentially, so someone may not then leave their home where they have all of the things that they may need for that disability, they would certainly not be coming into crisis accommodation where they don't have it available, that it's available. It's a big barrier.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Commissioner, I have no further questions. I don't know if you wish to ask the panel.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Thank you, I will if that's okay. Thank you for elucidating for us some of the unmet needs, particularly those cohorts to which you referred. I'm interested in eligibility criteria generally, but I might specifically ask you, Ms Di Pinto, you reflected on the DV crisis line and the fact that, you know, it's available for adult women, for example. Am I right in thinking that there are further restrictions in terms of a time frame in which violence has occurred?

Mishelle Di Pinto:

Yes, so essentially it is around the risk at that present moment, so if we're talking historic domestic violence and essentially a service would not be provided because we are looking at it as a crisis response and essentially what is the imminent risk to that person that is presenting or that is calling through the DV crisis line. That creates a big barrier for women that are essentially looking at early intervention, so things may be starting to occur, they believe that their risk is starting to escalate, but they don't need an imminent response essentially, they would not be provided a response at that time.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO: How tight is that time frame in terms of what constitutes imminent?

Mishelle di Pinto:

Imminent is imminent so within, you know, at that present time when they call, what is the risk to them right at that moment?

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

We've heard a lot about the deficiencies in or challenges with or suitability or lack of in relation to accommodation, be that transitional or crisis etc. And you've talked a lot about motels or even swags, hotels, motels. Our understanding from some of the submissions and listening sessions we've had is that even hotel or motel accommodation is drying up, not only because of a shortage of facilities but a reluctance among a number of places to provide that support so is that an experience that you've had that there's a very shrinking list?

Mishelle di Pinto:
I'm happy to speak to that. There is already a stigma attached to people experiencing domestic violence and the risk that that poses to a motelier or essentially when we're talking about, we've talked about regionally and in tourist centres, but essentially also the fact that there is a reluctance to provide that accommodation to somebody that is either experiencing domestic violence or homelessness and the risk that poses to a property. I can speak to, my service is based in Port Lincoln and I can speak to that specifically. We currently have one provider that will allow our clients to be provided accommodation and that is something that has changed over the years. There's been relationships built and then essentially they will change hands and then that drops out. But even though there has been work done with clients going into those properties around, you know, the best way to use the property, what the rules are and those sorts of things and that there is constant contact with that person, there is a real reluctance around providing those properties within that space.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
I note, in fact, all of you have reflected in some way on workforce and expertise. Counsel Assisting has talked about skill sets. Is it safe to say that there is a workforce shortage in your sector, partly because of some of the challenges you've outlined, particularly in regional areas attracting staff, but also as you were saying, Ms di Pinto, making sure that they are trained appropriately, you know, whether that's a trauma-informed or other sort of approach that people need to have. Is that something that we should be looking at, how you can, you know, better support or encourage people in your sector, people to work in the sector, but also how do you deal with the burnout in the sector? Is that real, vicarious trauma some of these issues?
Sandra Fuchs:
I think it would be absolutely real, whether it be the Domestic Violence Services or Homelessness Service. Every day a frontline staff member comes to work and may be confronted with a different story, you know, that little human side, listening to people's circumstances but also being challenged with working with families who need housing and it's not available and so every day you're fronted with somebody coming in, sharing their experiences and so taking on board what's happening for that person but also needing to meet with them again the next week and the next week and the next week and say I'm really sorry, we haven't got a housing outcome and so that has a real impact on our staff and our workforce. I think it contributes to the turnover of staff and people leaving the sector to take on roles that may be less challenging or have less impact over time, or even just for their own wellbeing needing to take a break. So absolutely from my experience, and I'm sure it's the same for all of us here, the impact of trauma is a huge presence.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Thank you.
Orla Matthews:
I think the research is showing that the workforce in community services or human services more broadly is going to be challenging for the next decade and there's lots of reasons behind that whether it be federal or state policy, for example immigration impacts aged care in a huge way because they make up a high proportion of the

workforce there. So that has a flow on effect into homeless and service delivery as well. I do think the workforce turnover is compounded by the housing crisis because traditionally we would be able to activate a housing outcome, work with our clients more holistically in a shorter time frame. What we are seeing is a longer time frame with support needed as a result of other system barriers. I think burnout in any human services work is real. I think burnout in high stress environments where big decisions need to be made every day is real. My reflection would be the homelessness system is no different to nursing, to you know even lawyers, child protection etc. We have many mechanisms both at an alliance level but wholeheartedly supported by our partners and in our alliance around how we support the people to be well at work and it's high priority for all of us in in this current climate in particular.

Shaya Nettle:

The only thing, if I could add to that, so as an alliance, Toward Home did a survey of all of our staff. and 20 staff across seven organisations focusing on well-being and vicarious trauma and whilst – because we have quite a strong retention rate and I think whilst it's still in the early days of alliancing, we get quite a bit of feedback from staff that the sense of purpose and united purpose, particularly across the alliance and being able to have a community of peers across multiple organisations has been a very strengthening and enabling source of strength for staff. So the data showed that while 70 % of staff identified a sense of burnout, only 11 % had the clinical symptoms and sign of burnout. And the other thing is according to, compared to the general population, we had extraordinarily high off the chart sense of purpose, belonging, meaning, which obviously are also then protective factors around staff wellbeing. So I think there is an invitation when we look at that from that more lateral lens as a community, how we can support each other to do the work. And so within an alliance context, when we look at potential benefits of an alliance approach, that was unexpected. That's been really unexpected to see how we've been able to cultivate a really really strong, skilled, resilient workforce across the Alliance and by doing that, it also means we're better able to fill the gap. So we had, just last week, we had a young 16-year-old rough sleeping in one of the inner southern regions and really quickly we had three teams working to make sure, do the safety check, go out and meet with her on the street, support her into our youth accommodation service, bring in, you know, wellbeing support around her, and that actually took the effort and collective response of four organisations in the Alliance, not a singular team, and obviously with that the sense of shared problem solving and collective responsibility for the issues that they're seeing every day. So whilst it's unevolved and unevaluated as yet, there's something in it for us where we're really trying to utilise the structure and the talents and strengths across the Alliance to lift staff up and wrap supports around them.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Thank you for that reflection. I've got no doubt that you all encapsulate the attributes to which you referred in that report. That sense of purpose is very, very clear. I'm conscious of time, so maybe you might want to take on notice. But I note you mentioned the Homelessness Australia report. I only had a cursory look, but my understanding from that was that there was quite a high percentage of South Australian organisations that apparently had closed their doors during the survey

timeframe, I'm not sure if that's something that we should be particularly conscious of and concerned about, is that?

Shaya Nottle:

So, that is true, and I think the findings of not being able to answer the phones, through the survey period, having to close the door at certain times, and not respond to emails I think were the three domains they looked at. I think, yes, it is concerning. I think the timing of the survey also happened to coincide with some, one of the senior managers said to me, some events where staff had to be taken off. that we're getting. So we're looking into that. Having said that, there is huge pressure. So I'll give an example of Hutt Street, who is within our alliance, after they do an incredible job of activating all of the community to support people experiencing homelessness, and after one o'clock, you know, they have they have a duty response, which is essentially two staff responding to people walking into the service. It doesn't take much then to overwhelm a response like that, and it's the same for our front doors like WestCare, like Baptist Care SA's WestCare site in the city, which are often funded by the organisation, they're not funded by funding contracts to do that, to keep those doors open. So when we talk about how do we keep doors open for people to access services, we often rely on organisations to fund them through philanthropy or fundraising as opposed to contracts themselves. So I think it would be a good consideration for future procurement to really be intentional around what our front doors are. by phone, by email, by walk-ins, we need to take walk-ins always, and for them to be prioritised in future funding as well.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Thank you for that and thank you for letting me keep you a touch over time. Very conscious that it sounds like you all go above and beyond finding innovative solutions in spite sometimes of criteria and your philanthropy and other efforts are clear to that. So thank you for your evidence this morning and I hand you back to Assistant Counsel.

Katie-Jane Orr: I have no further questions Commissioner, I'd ask that the panel of witnesses be excused.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Thank you. You are free to go. We will now take a break for lunch and reconvene at 1.30pm.

Witness:
Louise Kelly, Deputy CEO, OARS Community Transitions

Welcome back. We reconvene today's public hearings and I hand over to Counsel Assisting.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Thank you Commissioner, I call Louise Kelly.

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.

Louise Kelly:

I do truly and solemnly affirm. Louise Christine Kelly.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Take a seat thank you. Ms Kelly are you the deputy CEO of OARS community transitions? And is it correct that you have been nominated by your organisation to speak on behalf of OARS today?
Louise Kelly:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Can you tell us a bit about OARS please?
Louise Kelly:
Sure, so OARS is 137 years old this year. We've been working primarily in South Australia for that time, supporting people in contact with the criminal justice system, primarily those who have offended, but also their families and supports around them. And our primary aim is to enhance community wellbeing by reducing offending and victimisation.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and what kind of services, generally speaking, do you provide to those people?
Louise Kelly:
So OARS provides a range of services in terms of housing and homelessness services, wraparound case management support, counselling for drug and alcohol, domestic and family violence, gambling and some child sex offender reintegration services, some specialised services, independent living and supports and a range of different services that sort of fit the broader cohort for that client group.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Do you also provide support to people who might be on home detention bail from the courts?
Louise Kelly:
Yes, so we provide a wraparound support service to people in home detention either sentenced to or released from court order onto home detention.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Do you deal with people who have offended or are at risk of contact with the criminal justice system? Does that include people who use violence?
Louise Kelly:
Yes, so we also worked for all of our time working with people who've offended, however specifically in the last 15 years we've had quite targeted domestic and family violence services for people who are either currently perpetrating or at risk of perpetrating violence, harm, abuse or control.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So how do these people engage with, or I should ask generally, not just in relation to domestic and family violence, how do these people engage with or come into contact with OARS?
Louise Kelly:
So given that we have quite a lengthy history, we are quite well known in the community with people who have offended. However, so we're often in contact with people either through the courts, through homelessness services, correctional services, prisons, post-release, pre-sentence, through quite a range of different drug and alcohol avenues, GPs, but most predominantly through the criminal justice system.

Katie-Jane Orr:
and those services that you've just mentioned refer people in to you?
Louise Kelly:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Can people who use violence or other offenders contact you directly?
Louise Kelly:
Absolutely, so our services are available to anyone who is concerned, particularly our domestic violence services, concerned about their thoughts, beliefs and actions. We have a phone line service that runs, the Don't Become That Man service, where men or anyone in the community can actually contact for support or advice around ways to change behaviour and actions and address their concerns for themselves or someone else in their life.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and I understand that you take some referrals from Child Protection.
Louise Kelly:
Yes, we do. We receive referrals from Child Protection a lot through our homelessness space in terms of our domestic violence services, but also generally for our domestic and family violence services and some of our drug and alcohol services.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And so how does that work, like in what circumstances will that department refer people to you?
Louise Kelly:
Generally when they are working with the whole family in the earlier assessment phase, they will refer primarily fathers through for accommodation services to provide some space in the family to work with mum and children around child protection concerns and to give that respite and separation so that each party in the family can work on what needs to happen to address child protection concerns.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And, just so I understand it correctly, is that where there is seen to be a risk with that male, the father, in the house?
Louise Kelly:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So today I want to ask you mainly about your work for people who use violence, probably obvious for this Royal Commission, and particularly in the area of providing accommodation or housing to those people. So in relation to accommodation services for people who use domestic or family violence, I understand you have two main options for those people, is that correct?
Louise Kelly:
Yes.

Katie-Jane Orr:
And correct me if I'm wrong about this, but the first is a general service which is available to any of your clients, but you can house domestic family violence offenders through that.

Louise Kelly:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Can you tell us a bit about that programme or that support service?
Louise Kelly: Yes, so we operate the Ex-Custodial Homelessness Support Service as part of a directly contracted service through the Department of Human Services sitting outside of the Alliance framework. So that service operates state-wide and we have 159 beds, essentially some are in share accommodation and some are independent, where we primarily can house people post release from prison or who are at risk going through the Court system, might be on bail, parole, home detention, any range of community service orders, so obligations through the justice system. So we have 159 properties, we've been operating variations of that for about 30 years and in the last 14 years, so since 2010, the properties that were spoken about earlier this morning, the supportive housing properties, we have 10 of those that were designated as a perpetrator housing service that are supportive housing tenancies or transitional housing properties that have been operating in that space.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Do you mean the evidence that was given at the hearings this morning?
Louise Kelly:
Yes
Katie-Jane Orr:
Thank you. So then turning to the second option, accommodation option, for people who use domestic or family violence provided by OARS. Can you tell us about that?
Louise Kelly:
Yes, so we also have a Domestic and Family Violence Perpetrator Response Pilot programme, which is nine properties that are in the Metro that are domestic and family violence specific. We commenced operating that in 2021, 2020, and that, 2020, sorry, and that is very much a crisis response. it was intended to be an opportunity to divert women and children from needing to leave the family home and go into motel accommodation.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I want to ask you about that perpetrator response pilot in particular, so this is the nine specific beds that you've spoken about. So can you tell us, you've said since 2020 and nine beds, tell us about that pilot and what you're doing.
Louise Kelly:
Sure, so the accommodation as part of that contract is available for a one-month tenancy, which is not a very long period of time, but we are actually able to take referrals into that accommodation 24 hours a day. So those properties, Metro-based, are available. We will occasionally receive a phone call from SA Police, Child Protection. We have a range of different avenues for referral where we can take someone immediately assuming that we have a vacancy into those properties. They will, the men primarily in that accommodation will work with a case manager focused initially on accessing alternative accommodation but as we've heard today it is very difficult to access alternative accommodation at the moment. We are in a housing crisis and we want to be able to work with these men for a longer period of time to enable that change in beliefs, actions and behaviours, so that they're not continuing to provide that risk to current, former or future partners. One month isn't a very long

period of time, so we've put some processes together to be able to create further opportunity to continue engaging because we don't want for men's accommodation to end and their only option to be to return home if that's not a safe option.

Katie-Jane Orr:

I will ask you in a moment about the pathway after that one month, but first of all, do you have any eligibility criteria for the people able to access this programme?

Louise Kelly:

So it is quite broad. It is over men over 18, able to live independently, and either a perpetrator or at risk of perpetrating violence. It doesn't need to be an intervention order. There don't need to be any criminal charges, but just concern. And it can be available for any kind of opportunity as long as they want to engage in that service.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And so you said the first priority during that one month is to find them accommodation. And what else is happening for these people in that initial period of time?

Louise Kelly:

So we have also worked with the Office for Women and created an intervention service to work alongside the case management because just addressing the housing isn't actually going to help in the long run in that change. So we have created, everyone that's in that accommodation has both a case manager and an intervention practitioner who will work with them independently and then collectively with the whole service to engage in intervention, challenging behaviours, accountability, but also then rebuilding and focusing on a pathway forward.

Katie-Jane Orr:

so then what is, what happens after that one month in that accommodation, generally speaking.

Louise Kelly:

So as I mentioned, one month is not a very long period of time. So what we have created out of our different pieces of funding through the homelessness space is a pathway that we're calling Time Out for Treatment. So after one month, the men can then go into our share accommodation. We have a five-bed facility that we're operating as a therapeutic community and men will work together with our intervention counsellors and also case manager on-site to address all of their concerns but also really kind of working together in that space to understand who's kind of experiencing problems, holding accountable, holding each other accountable and then working in both a group-based and individual-based space, so they can stay there for three months, so that creates a little bit further time. We also then bring in some of the other services that are funded independently at OARS, so our drug and alcohol counsellors will also run programmes, and our gambling counsellors, and just depending on other avenues, we've got referral options post that service outside of it but also we can bring others into that space.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And so, I think you've made it clear from what you're saying, but the perpetrator pilot with the nine beds, that was funded for this one month of accommodations. So you have created these other avenues with funding from elsewhere.

Louise Kelly:
Yes, it's quite a common thing that we've regularly needed to do within the services that we have at AUS is creating wraparound services from different funding sources and targeted for our client cohort.
Katie-Jane Orr:
What happens after that three months in the transitional shared accommodation?
Louise Kelly:
So after that three months we then have the option of the supportive housing transitional properties that we've spoken about this morning. So we have eight properties in the metropolitan area and two in regional area where they can then transition into for six to 12 months time living independently. And so at all kind of critical transition points make sure that all of the services are in place and obviously in the share accommodation it's quite intensive support and making sure that that as someone transitions out of that space there's safety and stability in that process as well because that's really key. That is then also an opportunity those properties we're not the landlord of and so a community housing provider are the landlord and so that then also gives the clients a further rental history and opportunities for references and creating that independence from the group-based environment.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And then is the aim at the end of that for them to acquire their own private arrangement?
Louise Kelly:
Yes, so through that sort of 10 months across those three different parts that we've kind of supplemented through the different avenues of funding around our homelessness, we've been able to create sort of a lengthier pathway that's allowed that. We have, so some, for example, some child protection referrals have not gone through that whole 10 months. They may have skipped the share accommodation if they have access to children, or if it's deemed safe and suitable for the whole family for him to return home, that has been the case as well, where Child Protection have supported that decision, but every case is different.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And your aim is then to match the services and the accommodations to the need of the client?
Louise Kelly:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
These property services, so you've got nine beds for the crisis response housing and then you've also got, I think you said earlier, 159 beds available to us.
Louise Kelly:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
You but it's that for everyone. Are there any dedicated domestic family violence beds out of that?
Louise Kelly:
So 19, so the nine perpetrator response and the 10 perpetrator housing service. And the other 140 are generalist, ex-custodial client cohort, but not to say that there's not people who've had domestic violence offences or just even matters or concerns

around control and abuse.

Katie-Jane Orr:

I want to touch on funding, which you have mentioned as we've been talking. I understand that OARS is not part of the alliances that we heard about this morning. And again, I'll just ask about the nine houses. Is that funding for a set period?

Louise Kelly:

Yes it is, so at the moment our contract for those nine houses ends at the end of December. This year? This year, and our broader ex-custodial contract is until June next year, which has been annual rollover funding for some time.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And do you know what's happening at the end of December this year?

Louise Kelly:

We have been advised that we will be receiving a contract but we don't have that at this stage.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And then you've explained that you use your other funding for other services that you put around that nine house accommodation programme.

Louise Kelly:

Yes. We want it to be successful. We were involved in the initial conversations around setting up that accommodation and everyone sort of raised concerns around the one month and around the funding capacity to really provide a stable support in both one month but also what can we really do in terms of intervention in that time while we're still trying to establish that connection and rapport, but not also ensuring that we're not colluding with any behaviours that are coming through as a result of their offending. So, one month is a very, very short amount of time to be able to really delve into that space. So, it's been incredibly valuable to set up the pathway through to the longer term supports.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And the nine houses are in metropolitan Adelaide? Do you have, so I can take it from that, that there is no such service in regional areas?

Louise Kelly:

No, there's not. We can receive referrals from anywhere. However, being able to access the property is a challenge. We have probably the furthest away we've received referrals is Gawler and then Victor Harbour. So where we have had that engagement from SA Police overnight or in the evenings, they've mostly been supportive in either transporting or arranging transport for the men to those properties. We've got pin codes on the doors so they can enter at any time of night if need be.

Katie-Jane Orr:

That's police officers who are dropping people there?

Louise Kelly:

Yes.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Do they check that with you first and then..?

Louise Kelly:

Oh yes, they don't have the code, we have. We get that phone call first.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Are you aware, I just want to get an idea of how many of these kinds of services exist in South Australia for people who use violence, so are you aware of any other services providing similar accommodation for people who use violence in South Australia?
Louise Kelly:
I think generally speaking there will be people who have used violence in our broader homelessness sector but in terms of that wraparound accountability intervention and focus on the reasoning for their accommodation need, it's not a targeted response.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So this targeted, purpose-built, specific, perpetrator, domestic family violence response? Yes. And nothing else like it that you're aware of. What are the benefits to this kind of set-up and these kind of accommodation options for people who use violence?
Louise Kelly:
So I think really key for us is that while the person that's using violence is our client and is the direct recipient of the service, it's actually the victim survivor's needs that drive their eligibility and guide the access to that accommodation. So one of the main benefits is that assuming it's safe to do so women and children can remain in their own home, they can remain in their local community, school and access to their services and not needing to live in motel accommodation and uproot their lives. It also creates a sense of accountability because the person that's actually creating the harm is needing to shift. They are needing to address that behaviour, recognise and take responsibility for that, and also have that opportunity to change and the belief that change can happen and have those opportunities available. We often hear people who have either been in prison on remand, who are released and return home and haven't addressed any of their behaviour or without that level of accountability don't have a full understanding of what's actually happening. Being able to offer that with that accommodation really shows a response that enables or creates an opportunity for intervention and change.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So on that, this wraparound support that you're providing that assists with rehabilitation and prevention, can you talk to that a little bit about how that helps?
Louise Kelly:
So the intent is to provide that wraparound service. The accountability and intervention is central to everything that we do, but so is also safety. So creating safety plans with those men around what it is that, you know, where their behaviour may be coming from, what it is that's impacting on that. We often hear conversations around well, it was while I was drinking so we need to actually make some change in that belief and attitude to actually address that behaviour because those two things don't need to coexist. So we, by being able to create that wraparound support, having that additional support, we're seeing a lot of referrals that have a comorbidity of domestic and family violence and gambling addiction and so being able to actually work with those things together in an accountable intervention focus with a gendered lens and domestic and family violence focus is really valuable.

Katie-Jane Orr:
So trying to solve the cause rather than simply provide the accommodation.
Louise Kelly:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
It, by providing houses for people who use violence, it also avoids, I guess, the risk of homelessness for those people. How does that risk of homelessness or in fact homelessness impact the risk of re-offending or the risk of using violence again?
Louise Kelly:
So generally speaking, homelessness is a huge cause in offending. In domestic and family violence, it's used as coercion, tactics around coercing to return home. Those control mechanisms, either around the house or around finances that are associated with homelessness, so creating, sorry not creating, but that aspect of homelessness will generally speaking ensure, not ensure, sorry, but will create vulnerabilities and we know that by addressing kind of the key crisis focus of that housing, we can then be able to address the other aspects. So we know that homelessness and finances are huge stresses, employment is a big stress, and so when those things are a part of people's lives, creating further harm is almost inevitable.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Is it also the case that if a person experiencing violence thinks that the only alternative is their partner is going to be homeless, does that impact the person experiencing violence? Does that impact their behaviour?
Louise Kelly:
Yes, absolutely. We've seen and had many examples of people returning home because, perpetrators returning home because they were going to be homeless and so victim survivors in vulnerable positions have allowed perpetrators to return home and have not been safe in that space to create that barrier, and it's been regularly seen, we hear it from conversations around the sector, but generally speaking, yes, if we, where we can intervene and provide that response, often if police have attended a property and there's a reason to contact us to rehouse him, whether a respite space or for longer term. If that offer isn't accepted, he generally stays in the home or will leave while police are there and return an hour later.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So we've heard about the benefits of this type of approach but I'll ask the direct question, are you finding this housing programme to be successful?
Louise Kelly:
Yes, we are.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And what are your measures? And what are your measures of success. Tell us about that.
Louise Kelly:
Sure. So, generally speaking, yes, we are finding it successful, mainly because we've sort of pulled different pieces together to supplement the one month because, as we were just talking about, if, you know, that one month was ending, quite often we would see the perpetrator return home. But further kind of time in that space allows more time for change and accountability. So, while we haven't had a formal evaluation because it hasn't been funded, we have done some work with Flinders

Uni who did review bits of what we've kind of pulled together and supplemented, but it was a couple of years ago as there were funding shifts, so it's not really representative of where it's at now, and the sample size was quite small of the men that were engaged at the time.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Leaving aside the formal evaluations, are there any measures of success that you can see in what you've been doing?

Louise Kelly:

Yeah, so a big measure of success is the ongoing engagement with service, that they're still actually choosing to participate, because while it's, a housing option is still voluntary. So it is still a choice to engage in the case management and the counselling. So while primarily the choice is you have accommodation and these are the services that come with that. If you don't participate in those, the accommodation isn't available. Generally speaking, the engagement is voluntary. And so the connection to other services, we do have data on breaches of intervention orders and in our accommodation services, that our domestic violence specific services, the breaches of intervention orders while engaging with those services are almost none.

Katie-Jane Orr:

So you're talking about a scenario where the person that you're housing, there is an active intervention order between that person and the person experiencing violence and there's been no breaches or almost no breaches in the time that they're there. Are there any challenges or issues in this programme?

Louise Kelly:

Of course. So, aside from the lack of access to ongoing accommodation and the timeframes and things, some of the challenges do exist around referral points. Ideally, in a perfect world, we would also be able to, or we can receive them, we would like to see referrals come through the Homeless Connect, Homeless Gateway, but in order to be able to do that, men, primarily men would need to self-identify their reason for their current housing crisis or homelessness being as a result of them using violence. So that's not, it's probably too early in some of those conversations to really elicit that response. So while it's an aimed at earlier intervention by the time that police are kind of engaged, you know, a bit further down that path. In saying that, some of the referrals that we do receive from police, there have been no charges, there are no intervention orders, there's a concern or a non-offence domestic violence matter, so we do receive those kinds of referrals. And that's where child protection has come in really well. Those referral options opening up with child protection where there's concern, there's an investigation, assessment investigation that's happening to create that space, whether it's respite or longer term in the family, so that child protection can assess and do the work that needs to be done has been really effective. The funding structure in the homelessness space as we've heard this morning from the witnesses because a lot of the domestic violence sector in South Australia is homelessness funded and eligibility around crisis services for victim-survivors. When we house the perpetrator, victim-survivor cannot access a DV service. because of the homelessness target of that. Because they are not at risk of homelessness. Which has created this really horrible dilemma for us because assuming it's safe for her to remain in the family home, then this is a brilliant option for him to be removed and engage with services, but that shouldn't leave

victim survivors without support. And the other part that that creates as well is because of the siloed spaces within the sector. It means that we don't necessarily have a corresponding service for the victim-survivor and we can't check in on where things are at. So like we can with child protection where we can understand whether it's safe for him to return home and whether there's different pieces of information that we could be using to elicit that engagement. We don't have that opportunity unless there is already a support in place. We can use information sharing guidelines to be able to do that, but there's no structure or funded service to correspond with that at the moment. It is something that we've been pushing for and that everyone's been requesting because it's so important to have both parts of that story, particularly in one month, it's just not enough time for that kind of assessment and judgement to be made.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Commissioner, I have no further questions of this witness.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Thank you. I've got a few, but I have to say you're an excellent witness, Ms Kelly, because you've pre-empted, as you've got a lot, some of my questions. Specifically, maybe starting with, Ms Orr asked you about that eligibility criteria. And I was really curious as to, and you pretty much answered that it's a non-compulsory.

Louise Kelly:
Yes, I agree.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
If you satisfy the criteria, you don't have to take up that intervention services or the case management that is not related to looking for housing. Have you considered making that a condition of entry into this housing?

Louise Kelly:
So this is a condition of tenancy.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Right.

Louise Kelly:
However...if, as that tenancy ends, we don't have any scope within the Residential Tenancies Act to evict someone for not engaging with case management.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Right.

Louise Kelly:
And particularly with the changes to the Residential Tenancies Act from early July, it is written into our contracts and so it is through our tenancy agreements that they will engage with service but there's very little repercussion, if they don't, legally that we can actually do. So if they then choose not to move out, we can certainly take it to the Tribunal but it hasn't.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Forgive me if I miss this, but what is the uptake then among those, and I use the word perpetrators only because you referenced?

Louise Kelly:
It's a great principle.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
The pilot programme, what is the uptake in some of those services?

Louise Kelly:
It's actually pretty good. So the uptake, once we can kind of, that first month is difficult. That is very much really kind of a treatment readiness, kind of engagement space, understanding ways and means understanding domestic and family violence, but really kind of a brief intervention to understand impact of why you're here, what's happened. The sooner we can engage with someone into that accommodation the better around that space. That's sort of like 48 to 72 hours from incident or police involvement or whatever it is that's brought them into that crisis accommodation is the best. So a case manager will be out there first thing the next morning and if we can't, we aim to get our intervention counsellors on the phone to them at least as soon as possible because that connection as early in the cycle of violence as possible is the better.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
I was going to ask what success looks like and how you measure it, but that's obviously ably been handled. I'm just curious, obviously as a measurement tool, the breaches of intervention orders is a clever assessment. What about engagement with victim survivors or the people who are experiencing that violence? Is that something that, again, noting there hasn't been a formal evaluation, but is that part of the process as well?
Louise Kelly:
It's not. That's what we would love to have that, but we'd love to do that in a safe way with the victim survivors to have that support as well to be able to access that. But the structure of the funding hasn't allowed us to do that, but absolutely we would love to have that feedback.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
And your reflections, as per other witnesses... around what seems to me a massive gap, this idea that if you have housing for someone who is perpetrating violence, meaning that victim survivors are not eligible for services, what would you do to change that? Would that just be a change in eligibility criteria or are we looking at different funding mechanisms?
Louise Kelly:
I think there's a couple of bits. We've got the, the alliances have the Safe at Home model, but they don't quite connect specifically with this. So what would be great would be to have, as a part of this service, whether like with OARS or separate, have a genuine corresponding case manager, counsellor, intervention service for victim survivors, so that when perpetrators are referred to this service, there's an automatic response like a women's safety contact response like we have through the Court system so something like that so that there is that and that they become a part of that holistic team so including the drug and alcohol counsellors, gambling supports, everyone has that holistic representation. At the moment our team meet, our internal team without drug and alcohol domestic violence, case managers, gambling team all meet monthly at a minimum to go through every one of the men that are going through that 10 month process and we would love to have and it would be ideal to have that corresponding voice at the table.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Right. I've been fortunate to, with OARS, witness or speak to some of the men on remand who have engaged in at least one of your programmes. I think it's the Don't

Become That Man programme. So is that something that is determined by prisons or the courts or is this perpetrators putting their hand up to engage in that programme on a volunteer basis?

Louise Kelly:
in the Remand Centre?

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
in the Remand Centre.

Louise Kelly:
The men in that programme are putting their hand up on a volunteer basis. We run that Monday to Friday and it is just offered on a Monday morning. “This programme is on, would you like to participate?”

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
You know how many men that you've assisted?

Louise Kelly:
Not off the top of my head, but the first three months we had 270 engagements through that programme. And some of those men will have come back throughout the week, but I can get those numbers for you.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Very interesting. I suspect that has not been formally evaluated?

Louise Kelly:
No but it is being evaluated. That's part of the National Partnerships funding, so it has come along with an ANROWS evaluation as well.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
I appreciate your reflections on actions, beliefs and behaviours, obviously attitudes and behaviour, they're not linear. So it's interesting, it's quite a complex process to address some of those drivers. Back to the month-long issue, you've talked about the challenges in such a short time frame, let's look at the beds that are provided too. If you're talking 9 and 10 or 19, is that enough?

Louise Kelly:
No

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
What would you say the demands might be, or is that a bit too much of a hypothetical?

Louise Kelly:
It's probably a bit too much of a hypothetical. I think we probably need to strengthen some of the referral pathways as well to really create that wraparound support and make sure that the referrals are coming at the right time to really enable that engagement. We, in that, those accommodation services, we are primarily taking clients into those services outside of the justice system, so not post-release from prison, even from remand, to be able to create that space, particularly as we've just seen the introduction of increased crime detention laws for domestic violence perpetrators, to be able to scale up to meet that demand that comes with that housing would be incredible, but would also enable, and that's why we're really keen to obviously work a bit closer in that home detention space because there is that statutory compliance, but also then the capacity to really provide an intervention while engaging in that space.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
And I know you've touched on the funding issues, but just to clarify, when you mentioned annual basis for funding.
Louise Kelly:
Yes.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
I'm not at the risk of it sounding like a Dorothy Dixer, I imagine that leads to some uncertainty and insecurity at times, specifically with staffing as well.
Louise Kelly:
Yeah, it does with staffing, it also impacts on length of leases that we can offer people, which becomes quite a challenge, but yes it does impact on staffing. We have done a lot of work with staff over the years, that we do everything we can to not lose staff in that time, but sometimes we don't get notice for a couple of weeks and our staff have to live somewhere as well. We don't need them impacting the housing crisis either.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Thank you for your evidence today, I'll hand it back to you.
Katie-Jane Orr: I Ask the witness to be excused, Commissioner.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
You are free to go. Thank you very much.

Witness:
Olive Bennell, CEO Nunga Mi:Minar

Katie-Jane Orr:
Thank you. Commissioner, the next witness is Olive Bennell. And if she's ready to go, I'll call Olive Bennell.
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.
Olive Bennell:
I do truly and solemnly affirm.
Kerryn Hawkes 2:
Can you please state your full name?
Olive Bennell:
Olive Mary Bennell
Katie-Jane Orr:
Hello. Ms Bennell, you are the Chief Executive Officer of Nunga Mi:Minar?
Olive Bennell:
That's correct.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and can you tell us what Nunga Mi:Minar is, please?
Olive Bennell:
Yes, so Nunga Mi:Minar is an Aboriginal community controlled organisation that delivers services primarily to our community around domestic and family violence and is part of the statewide domestic and family violence alliance.

Katie-Jane Orr:
We've heard about that this morning. How long has Nunga Mi:Minar been operating?
Olive Bennell:
We are 50 years young tomorrow, so we're having a birthday party.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Happy birthday. And are you able to say about how many families you support annually?
Olive Bennell:
Annually we probably, we started as a very small service with six staff and we were supporting around a hundred and eighty to ninety families, not individuals, during that time. Geographically statewide. We are funded for the northern region of Adelaide but our clientele comes also from rural and remote communities and cross-border.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And I think you said you provide domestic family violence frontline services, do you provide accommodation?
Olive Bennell:
We have a crisis response on-site with six units. We also provide support through the specialist housing programme in partnership with the housing trust. We also deliver some supports through transition and I know you've heard about the motel accommodation. We provide outreach to clients that are based in motel and or clients that are already housed, particularly in housing trust, public housing.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And do you provide, you said you provide outreach, do you provide other supports to your clients as well?
Olive Bennell:
We will do advocacy and referral, yes, to other services but primarily we're under the same homelessness funding with safety being our predominant response with the homelessness response as well.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And that's, we've heard about that this morning in the context of the Alliance model. You said before that you're an Aboriginal community controlled organisation. Can you explain what that means for the Commission?
Olive Bennell:
So the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation means that we are governed by an Aboriginal board and in most instances try to recruit a minimum of 50 % of our staffing as Aboriginal staff.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and I understand it's part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the idea of Aboriginal community controlled organisations, I mean.
Olive Bennell:
We are a member of SAACCON, which is the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network. So there are about 22 organisations within SAACCON and we collaborate with government on developing strategies and reviewing policy around how to work in collaboration with government to close the gap in South Australia.

Katie-Jane Orr:
I think you said before that you're a partner of the Statewide Domestic and Family Violence Alliance.
Olive Bennell:
Yep.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Are there any other ACCOs, or Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, within that specialist alliance?
Olive Bennell:
No.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Nunga Mi:Minar is the one?
Olive Bennell:
Not in the DV one. Every alliance has an ACCO.
Katie-Jane Orr:
But in terms of specialist DV?
Olive Bennell:
No, it's just us.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I want to ask briefly about funding. You've mentioned that you're an Alliance member so you receive funding through the National Agreement, which we've heard is called the NASHH or referred to as the NASHH.
Olive Bennell:
Yeah.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and that is primarily homelessness funding. I also understand that your services are primarily directed towards women and children experiencing domestic and family violence and by that I mean in the context of the Alliance funding. Is that too simplistic?
Olive Bennell:
Well, part of the homelessness policy direction is that it's women and children, and children are clients in their own right, yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And we've also heard this morning that the response, the service response, is a crisis response.
Olive Bennell:
Yes.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and we heard this morning that when we're talking about the funding through the alliances that that funding doesn't allow for early intervention or prevention programmes.
Olive Bennell:
That's correct.
Katie-Jane Orr:
so you're in the same boat in that regard. But I also understand that Nunga Mi:Minar has obtained some additional funding which allows you to extend your services and provide broader services to some people.

Olive Bennell:
Yep, so the Commonwealth Government has the National Partnership on Domestic and Family Violence and there was a tender process which we were part of and there were two elements. There was a mainstream funding element and an Aboriginal specific funding element. And the Aboriginal specific funding element, we applied for funds for a programme that we've called Kumangka, Kumangka means together, so it's my ACCO and KWY, which is another Aboriginal community controlled organisation that provides a broader suite of programmes than we do. And we were successful in receiving just under a million dollars each to deliver more, and this word keeps coming up, but more holistic service to families. outside of the structure with the Alliance. So we work with what people are calling the perpetrator and the family and the extended family in a lot of instances.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So I want to ask you more about that.
Olive Bennell:
The second part of the funding is we are part of the partnership that includes migrant women and KWY works with OARS around an early intervention programme, but our focus is community engagement and community education and we engage with communities to denormalise violence and that's within the Aboriginal community and the broader community because not all of our family makeup is Aboriginal. In a lot of instances our women's intimate partners are non-Aboriginal and may be same-sex partners as well.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So I want to ask you about providing accommodation services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and I want to talk to you about, or I want you to explain to us I should say, about a culturally appropriate approach, as you see it, to providing accommodation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. So perhaps the best way to do it is for you to tell us about the model that Nunga Mi:Minar is using to provide those services.
Olive Bennell:
So you've already heard about the homelessness priorities and the DV priorities. And for us, in terms of looking at supporting families who are experiencing domestic violence, we can't look at a Western family model. So we have to look at an extended and kinship model. model. And that means that kinship is about connexion to country, to family, to extended family and is not the normal model of family. So our model really is based around the social emotional wellbeing of the total family, including the extended family. And we work with the family on what their priorities are, which is a bit different to the homelessness agenda and the DV agenda, where you've got a package of information and a package of funding, and that's what you offer. We actually sit and our vision is to walk alongside our families in their journey of healing, because we're talking about intergenerational trauma, we're not just talking about DV. and we talk to families about what behaviours do you want to see change within your family and what is it that you want for yourself and your children to be safe, healthy and have good well-being. So the model is very different because it's more of a narrative approach to begin with. We certainly have to follow the assessment processes that we're required to complete in the funding element that we've got and we need to follow the KPI responses but we can be innovative in how

we do that and that's what we do in essence. It's about listening to what that family needs in their journey of healing and then working with them to secure whatever support they need and sometimes that will be in partnership with other organisations and sometimes times it will be, the first three things that they want is safety for themselves, safety for their children and for their children to be able to access their extended family including their dad. So we'll work alongside whatever organisation we can secure to support that family with programmes.

Katie-Jane Orr:

You mentioned intergenerational trauma. Can you tell us a little bit more, can you explain a little bit more about how that impacts on how you might deal with a domestic violence situation?

Olive Bennell:

Yeah, I guess from the learnings that we have within our organisation is that from colonisation there has always been violence and conflict within community and that impacts on the whole family and it impacts on the extended family. So if you can't, if you don't recognise that intergenerational trauma then the healing process is disjointed. An example of that might, is that the fact that we might have and have had three generations of a family come through our service. So we'll have grandma, mum, granddaughter and granddaughter might be just about to have a baby. and it's because they haven't healed and they haven't had the opportunity to grow and have long-term sustainable support within their journey. Sometimes we have families that come to us that have never had any understanding of financial management or how to run a house or in fact how to care for children and parenting skills because they've never been shown. So that trauma extends to every facet of their life and so that's what we've got to work with in concert with the fact that we need to be able to say what is it that you want in this particular part of your journey and then when when you've achieved that what's the next thing and then what's the next. The difference is that we need to be more creative and have lots more partnerships with others to achieve what our people need. Because the homelessness agenda is only one element of the agenda and if you ask our people they'll say they're not homeless anyway because they can go and stay with auntie or they can go and stay with uncle or they can go and stay with their sister. So they're not homeless. So it's a very different concept in terms of the listening and the ability to respond to it.

Katie-Jane Orr:

When you talk about they can stay with auntie or they can stay with sister is that part of the kinshipcConcept that you were talking about before

Olive Bennell:

Yeah, and probably the best way for me to explain it because it's very, it's not, it's very complex because there is caste, there are skin names, there are moieties and there is connection to land and then it may be connection to land and sea depending on where the family sits. But if I could give you an example of my own story. So, my daughter started preps and everybody at school was bringing in information about their family and she's very excited and she put her hand up and said, you know, I'm so excited to be talking about my family because I've got four grandmothers and four grandfathers and then I've got all these uncles and the teacher said, no, you can't have four, you can only have two grandmothers and two grandfathers. So just that analogy and that assumption is about the extension of family. So, if someone

passes, somebody else steps up into that role. And I've had that experience in my own family. So, I guess that's the easiest and practical way for me to explain it because it is too technical to... We would need a couple of days to talk about kinship connection and connection to country and obligation...

Katie-Jane Orr:
Thank you, that's a helpful example. You mentioned before that you deal with families that are not all Aboriginal people and also you deal with domestic family violence that is not just between intimate partners or domestic partners. Can you just tell us a bit more about that?

Olive Bennell:
Yes, so in terms of the data that we collect, 78 % of the families we work with, the intimate partner is not Aboriginal. And a lot of the time, people assume that we're only working with Aboriginal communities. We work in the community. And that might mean that we work with a discrete community on a regional or remote position. We have also got intimate partners that are same-sex partners so we need to be mindful of the supports that we need to provide to them and how we manage that process. In terms of extended family, what generally happens if there is an issue with a particular member of the family, one of the other members of the family might step into that process and create difficulties in their behaviour. We don't use the deficit language about DV, we talk about changing your behaviour and what makes you have that behaviour. And usually it's somebody feels like they've got to advocate for somebody else, but the advocacy is really negative and doesn't help the situation, actually makes it worse. In a lot of the public housing that we have, we've got four generations living in one house, so there's huge overcrowding. So then the issue is that the family will obviously be lots of tensions around food and money and budgets and who's going to clean up and who's responsible for what. So it's about behaviour change and how you work together collaboratively to make sure that you're all safe and secure. It's a very different model to looking just at a housing concept or a DV concept.

Katie-Jane Orr:
So that leads me to my next question which is, you explained before that you are a specialist Aboriginal led family violence service provider.

Olive Bennell:
Mm-hmm.

Katie-Jane Orr:
But I assume that the other services in the other alliances do have Aboriginal clients?

Olive Bennell:
Yep.

Katie-Jane Orr:
And so Aboriginal people are accessing services across the whole board of those alliances. I understand that not all of those service providers, I don't know if any, are using this kind of culturally appropriate approach that you are talking about.

Olive Bennell:
That's correct.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Okay. And what's the effect on the Aboriginal clients if they are receiving a

mainstream approach? And I am generalising, I know it must change depending on individual circumstances.

Olive Bennell:

In the main, I think that they disengage. And then there's the element of response that says they're service resistant. And for me, that says to me that whatever service they're getting is not the appropriate service for them. I don't think anybody wants to be service resistant. They're just not getting their needs met. In terms of the alliance, the alliance is quite strong in its wanting to understand. and deliver more appropriate service responses to our people, but without Aboriginal staff working in them, that can't occur, because we are a different kind of people to mainstream. We have different needs and different family connections, and it can't be delivered in a Western family structure. It just doesn't work.

Katie-Jane Orr:

So thank you. Against that background, I'd like to ask you more about the accommodation services that Nunga Mi:Minar is offering, and I guess how we're hearing about, sorry, how this model that you've explained to us is being, what it looks like on the ground, or how it's being put into practise.

Olive Bennell:

Okay, so we have six units on site. It's a secure site, which means there is high security. We have security cameras and all of the residents have PIN codes to access the entry point units. The units are fully furnished and fully kitted out as if you were walking into your own home. And people are provided with their first amount of products to clean the house and for their own hygiene and the kids. They're well equipped and people feel quite comfortable when they come in. And for us that's about respect and recognising that they are coming there with probably nothing and to be able to give them the comforts that they deserve in a home. So, the issue that we really have though is that people are only meant to be there for three months. We find that three months is just enough time to stabilise someone. You can't, and we won't, transition anybody to specialist housing programmes and or there's not much opportunity for our people to ever receive private rental and like everybody else there's a bottleneck because you can't shift people out when there isn't an asset to shift them to.

Katie-Jane Orr:

So I might just step back now and go through that pathway. Can I just ask, first of all, you said you had six units. How big or how many bedrooms are those units?

Olive Bennell:

So in terms of the units at the moment, we've got four units with two bedrooms. We can sleep two children in those and mum and if there's a bub, then the baby can, we can set up a cot in mum's room. And then there are two bigger units, which are three bedroom. One of the children's bedrooms has two beds and the other has bunk beds and a single bed. So we can sleep a bigger family in the other two units. What we're finding, though, at the moment is that we've got a lot of young mothers with newborns or babies that are under a year old at the moment. So we, at the moment, do have all of our units. Obviously, we're always full, but we have young mums with babies. and over the last probably six months we've experienced more single women who've left intimate partners.

Katie-Jane Orr:
You said they're given everything they need to set up, are they offered supports while they're in there?
Olive Bennell:
So we also assist them with financial management and supports. A lot of our women leave without any identification. So the staff will take them to secure identification when they come in. If they haven't received a Centrelink payment or they're not eligible at that point, then we will give them vouchers and take them to the shops so they can get food. so that they're not wanting for anything at the beginning of the entry. And then we will work with them on what the next steps are for them. We also support women to apply for the Emergency Fund so that they can either park some of that money for when they do transition out and we'll work with them on budgeting so that they can purchase furniture and we work with a local provider who gives us a discount on furnishings.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So this is to set them up for the next step?
Olive Bennell:
To set them up when they do move.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Do they pay anything when they're in that? They pay 30 % of their income in rent in line with South Australian Housing Trust requirements. but they also pay their own utilities.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And what happens if they're not doing so well in that space?
Olive Bennell:
So if they're not doing well, we've employed an intensive tenancy officer and while they're in the units, they get a lot more support in terms of weekly checks and visits to see how they're going, if they need any support, if they understand how to keep a house and if they don't, to work alongside them with their agreement, how to keep a home, how to their finances, if they've got significant debt, helping them to have that debt removed. And that tenancy officer also will do advocacy if we're working with someone who is about to be evicted, they'll go to SACAT and do advocacy for them as well.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So put more supports in place as needed. And then, so when there's, you've talked about the bottleneck, if I can use that word, but when it's time to move out of that cluster, what happens next?
Olive Bennell:
We would have to be comfortable and confident in working with them that they're ready for that and then we would negotiate supported housing through the alliance as a panel and you put up your clientele for housing and community housing generally or in SAHA properties that have been aligned to the specialist housing programme and we would advocate that our client was ready for that and then move them in there but we would still do outreach with the client for maybe up to two years.

Katie-Jane Orr:
And I'm guessing that that is dependent on how many other people within the Alliance need accommodation.
Olive Bennell:
Absolutely. We're competing with each other.
Katie-Jane Orr:
And I think you said this before, but it takes an available house in that transition position or space for someone to be able to be moved out of the crisis accommodation, is that correct?
Olive Bennell:
We may also work with someone who is in public housing to make sure that they can maintain their housing and don't get evicted. So we'll do outreach, we might do some brokerage around skip bins and cleanups and supporting in that way. And if we get donations of furniture and other goods and we know that a family needs it then we'll make sure that they get that.
Katie-Jane Orr:
I think you mentioned before that it's difficult to get private rentals.
Olive Bennell:
Oh, impossible. the racism, our people don't have a chance with private rental. One of the things that we do want to do is to start to broker some partnerships with real estate agents because that's the only way we're going to be able to shift people and we want to also start to look at partnering with some banks around home ownership. A lot of our women, when they get their family tax benefit A and B, have significant amounts of money that can be used as part of a deposit. So, we're trying to be as creative as we can to respond to the gap and the need and public housing is about a seven year waiting list.
Katie-Jane Orr:
We've heard this morning that the lack of housing generally is causing further issues on an already full system.
Olive Bennell:
Yeah, absolutely. And look, because the private rental market has so many people that they can choose from, they will choose people that are probably more able to pay and have really good references. And generally our people don't have good references.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and a rental history.
Olive Bennell:
and rental history and funding to be able to sustain a rental property and the know-how of how to manage a rental property on your own because they've not lived on their own.
Katie-Jane Orr:
This model that you're using, so the culturally appropriate model and including the six cluster houses, is it in your view working successfully?
Olive Bennell:
We're starting to see small change, and I think it's because the staff that I have have a wide array of skills. We've got staff who've previously worked for Corrections and Education and Health and Aboriginal family support services. So we don't have a

static staffing structure, and we've got a lot of staff that have lived behaviour, learned behaviour, sorry, lived experience. So they bring that with them to support clients. So I think the difference with the model is that it's not a model that focuses on DV and it doesn't focus on housing, it focuses on what is it that you need for your family to heal and to have social and emotional well-being.

Katie-Jane Orr:

I should have asked before, how long has this cluster of the six units been operational?

Olive Bennell:

The cluster, the crisis accommodation has been around for 50 years. This new model has been introduced probably in the last two years since we got the additional funding. Because without that additional funding we would have to be very prescriptive in terms of the delivery
on a homelessness and domestic violence platform.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Are you able to describe what it is that you're seeing that's demonstrating to you that it's having some success and there is some change?

Olive Bennell:

So, I can give you a couple of examples, might be the best way to do it. So there was a family where the intimate partner, the male intimate partner was the perpetrator for one of the words. And all he wanted was to be able to provide for his family. That's what was triggering his violence. And so, for the first time, I should say, we've got male workers in our organisation now. So, we've got men's practitioners and they worked with him and he has a job now. And the violence has de-escalated, but we're also working with Mum because mum has triggers that she uses to make dad escalate. So, the outcome of that is that he had been in the corrections system for most of his life. He's now really proud that he's supporting his family. His children are happy, they're much safer and secure. Mum and he are getting on a lot better and they're going to counselling. So for the six months of work that's been done with them, that's a significant change in that family dynamic. So there was another situation, and I probably want to focus on men because mum and dad had a 16-year-old son who became a dad and dad was getting, his dad was getting quite annoyed with him because he was giving all of his money to the young lady that had the baby. When the staff member went and spoke to that young man, we found out, not through the formal assessment process, but we found out that he had an intellectual disability and that she was taking all of his money and he didn't understand why his dad was getting angry with him because he thought if he gave her all the money that she could look after the baby because he didn't want to look after it. But when we were presented with that issue, we were told that the dad was the perpetrator of violence and we needed to work with him because he was the problem, when in fact the violence was coming from the young lady who had the baby. And dad was frustrated because his son couldn't understand what was going on. So ultimately what's happened is the family structure is quite solid now and the young boy is having time with his child and the grandparents are having time with that child, but it's in a safe environment for all of them. So it just depends on the situation. There are so many different situations. We have had same-sex couples, and we've got a same-sex couple that we're working with at the moment, and the

intimate partners are both female. One is Aboriginal and the other is not. and so the child of one of them, the father's Aboriginal, so the father is supporting the woman with the child who is receiving the violence and we are working with both of them around what is it they want to do going forward. It's just depends on the circumstance. The critical thing is what the client or the customer identifies as what they need straight away. Because too often, I've worked in government, policy's written and you go and implement it but it's got nothing to do with what's really happening with the people that you're implementing it for.

Katie-Jane Orr:
I just want to ask you about one last topic, and you have mentioned it, but partnerships with other organisations.

Olive Bennell:
Absolutely critical. We can't do it all. So we have a partnership with a programme that's run out of Flinders for mental health and we have a psychologist who actually speaks language and he's worked with our people for a long time. We have the partnership with KWY, we partner with the other Alliance members, with NUNC, with Nunkuwarrin Yunti, and we will partner with anybody who wants to. We've done some work with the Aboriginal Society Group around justice reinvestment, Red Cross with justice reinvestment. We can't do what we need to do on our own. We need other partners, and of course there's the 22 Aboriginal community controlled organisations through SAACCON, so some of them provide disability service, education, we work with child protection a lot around stabilising families so that children don't get removed, and if they are removed, how we can work together to bring those children back into the family, whether it's through kinship care or whether it's through returning them to mum or dad in some instances. It just depends who it is. But we can't do the work that we do without them. We get a lot of support from ALRM around letting our families know their legal rights and responsibilities. So it depends on what that family need is and we'll go out and advocate for support for them. But for me it's about listening to what the client is telling you they want, not assuming you know what they need.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Thank you.

Olive Bennell:
Thank you.

Katie-Jane Orr:
Thank you. Commissioner, I have no further questions.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
I have a few, if you don't mind, Ms Bennell, Aunty Olive, thank you for your evidence today. I've had the privilege of seeing firsthand the services you provide and the team that you have. I have heard your comments about sort of the deficiencies in the funding mechanism, so I won't rehash that sort of eligibility criteria, area, but I would like you to expand on the concept of no wrong door, because you talk about that in submission and in other submissions and other places. Could you define that for the benefit of people who may be watching today?

Olive Bennell:
So the concept in homelessness is that there is no wrong door, but it's not evidenced in how homelessness operates. But for us, there is no wrong door. If a family needs

our support and they come to us and they're in crisis around domestic and family violence, we will make sure that we understand what it is that that family needs. And there isn't a wrong door for them to come through. If they come through our door and they need our support, then that's what we will do. We'll either do a referral somewhere where we know that they're going to get the support they need, or we'll advocate for support. My concept of No Wrong Door is very different to the homelessness platform of No Wrong Door because there is criteria that limits the ability of a homelessness service to respond to the community. So that's my answer. For me, no wrong door means if you come to our door and it's not our specialist service you need, I'm not going to turn you away, I'm going to make sure that we direct you to where you need to be.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

And the Commission has heard of some of your innovative efforts today and things that you do. You mentioned the importance of Aboriginal frontline workers. Is there a shortage? Do we need to do something?

Olive Bennell:

There is absolutely a shortage. We struggle ourselves in terms of being able to recruit Aboriginal staff, and I think it's because the stigma of domestic and family violence and the other correlation is working with child protection. So we will and we have in two instances now I've recruited people who have potential and we put them through training. But that's a long process, that's not a short process. But absolutely, the thing is that we can't compete with some of the government agencies that can pay quite a lot more to our people, and rightly so. We can't compete because we just don't have the money to do it.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

What about those mainstream services? You talk about the cultural appropriateness or otherwise, and the need for those services to be delivered if they are for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, they need to be provided by Aboriginal workers. Do you find that there's a shortage in that system as well?

Olive Bennell:

Absolutely, because they have the same issue that we have. They don't get the funding. My staff are paid at a SCHADS 5. Our people can go into government and have bigger salaries than we can offer. Some of the staff that I have could be in government in very senior positions. But they choose not to, they choose to be with us, so it's holding on to them, that's the challenge.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Can I ask one last question in relation to accommodation and in particular in relation to your submission? You talk about expanding funding and equitably distributing perpetrator accommodation options through a culturally responsive wellness centre approach. What does that mean?

Olive Bennell:

So for us, the missing bit in terms of accommodation is we only accommodate women and children in crisis, and that's probably the entry point, that and the DV gateway. So there is a huge gap in the ability for us to provide services to men in a men's wellbeing centre. So, there was a tender not long ago through the Aboriginal Action Plan that sits under the Domestic Violence National Plan and we applied to the Commonwealth for funding for a Men's Wellbeing Centre, which means that we

could run programmes but we could also look at how we might support men in accommodation as well, but we weren't successful because we're competing nationally.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
And those men would be men who have perpetrated violence or are at risk of perpetrating violence, but not necessarily men who've been charged or convicted with an offence? Would it be a broad...?

Olive Bennell:
All of that, yeah. In a previous life I run a bail accommodation centre and it was just accommodation but if you could build programmes around that and around others and that we worked with others, you know, OARS has some great programmes but it's very limited. There's not enough. There's not enough for perpetrators. And the other thing is some of our women are the perpetrators of the violence, not always the intimate partner is male. So there's still quite a few gaps in the system in terms of responding. And when we talk about DV, it's always around women and children, but it's not necessarily the case. We've had women in our own crisis accommodation who are actually the perpetrator, not the partner.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
I think we're appreciating the complexities, the more work we do. Thank you for your evidence today.

Katie-Jane Orr:
If the witness could be excused, please, Commissioner, and we might just take a five-minute break before the next witness.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Thank you. You're free to go.

Witness:
Nicole Chaplin, CEO St John's Youth Services

Katie-Jane Orr:
Welcome back.

Katie-Jane Orr:
I call Nicole Chaplin.

Kerryn Hawkes:
And that the evidence you shall give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I swear.

Nicole Chaplin:
I swear.

Kerryn Hawkes:
Please state your full name.

Nicole Chaplin:
Nicole Helen Chaplin

Katie-Jane Orr:
Ms Chaplin, you are the Chief Executive Officer of St John's Youth Services and how long have you been part of this?z

Nicole Chaplin:
St John's leadership team? Well technically 13 years, 3 years as the Chief Executive.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Can you tell us about St John's Youth Services?
Nicole Chaplin:
Yep, so St John's Youth Services is a South Australian based organisation. We're funded to run two programmes. One is a globally unique crisis accommodation service based in the city that sits outside of the Alliance system. And the other one is what I'm focusing on today, which is Foyer Port Adelaide based in Port Adelaide, which is more of a transitional accommodation with wraparound services to support young people and ages are 16 to 21.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So you support young people, you've just said, and experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Is it any young people, is there any particular demographic that
Nicole Chaplin:
Well, 16 to 21 and they need to be experiencing or at risk of homelessness, I must say that is probably a bit of an odd statement because actually with the demand on homelessness services at the moment it's about you need to be experiencing homelessness to get into a homelessness service. So the at-risk of is kind of dropping away because we just have no one's got the capacity.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Of those young people that you support, do some of them, or how many of them, have experienced domestic or family violence?
Nicole Chaplin:
Well that is a really hard number to come up with. I've certainly put some numbers in my submission that I did with the Foyer Foundation, and I've actually read yesterday the Commissioner of Children and Young People's report, which was amazing, with some great qualitative and quantitative data. But we kind of guess it's probably, the data says for South Australia in a nine month period it was around 19 % last year but that's so underreported. I would guess that young people have found themselves homeless because their family is experiencing domestic violence with them as a child or they're a perpetrator of domestic violence or they're a victim of domestic violence but young people certainly don't express that domestic and family violence and even intimate violence the same way that an adult would.
Katie-Jane Orr:
We heard a bit about that this morning from one of the alliances who the witness described. They present because of the homelessness and it's not until you ask more questions that it becomes apparent that's because there has been domestic violence. Is that consistent with your experience?
Nicole Chaplin Yes, absolutely consistent with our experience.
Katie-Jane Orr: And I should, because we've heard from the alliances this morning, is it correct that St John's is a member of the North West?
Nicole Chaplin:
Yes, Foyer Port Adelaide is a member of the North West.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So, I will ask about the Foyer a bit later. I just want to focus for a bit longer on the

impact of domestic and family violence on youth homelessness. We know that domestic and family violence affects young people. And I will, so that you don't have to go to it, in your submission you quoted some statistics. So you indicated that national statistics indicate that an estimated 4.2 million, so 21 % of people aged 18 years or older have experienced violence, emotional abuse, or economic abuse by a cohabiting partner since the age of 15. So, that was from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. And also that the experience of domestic family violence often leads to homelessness for young people. So, in South Australia, data from the last nine months reveals that 721 young people who were accessing specialist homelessness services sought that assistance due to domestic family violence. and so that's 19 % of the people seeking the services, which I think is the percentage that you gave us before. And then we talked about the fact that's likely to be underreported, so in fact it's probably a higher percentage of people. And I think you said before, you gave some examples of how the St. John's clients might be experiencing that violence, so some who perpetrate violence, some who, I think you said, intimate partner violence themselves, so they are the victim-survivor. Do you deal with young people who have left themselves from a violent home?

Nicole Chaplin:

Yes, absolutely. But they don't walk into our service and say, I've just walked out because my family home is violent. It's, you know, because I think there's certainly shame and embarrassment, but also threats from their family not to give up those secrets. So it takes quite a while to build relationship for us to actually uncover the real reason. And we actually work really hard because if any young person is able to return home, and especially those 16, 17-year-old young people, what we know the best place for them is if they've got a safe home, to be in a safe home. So we always explore, and as we're exploring that, quite often the safety issues they have with their family, whether that be a mum, a dad, or even another sibling, because that sometimes comes out as well, that it's actually another sibling that's been quite violent. So there's a range, you know, we pride ourselves on our interventions, been absolutely individually made up for a young person as an individual. We're very privileged in the services we run that there doesn't have to be house rules because none of our programmes, you know, we don't have shelters and houses, we have independent apartment living for both our programmes, so we really focus in on what works for that young person. And we have about a 30 % of our young people do return home, so they're returning home to somewhere safe, but that other percentage, that leaves a big percentage that it's not safe for them to return home.

Katie-Jane Orr

We also heard this morning in the evidence about some occasions when a parent might be seeking crisis accommodation or support, but an adolescent can't be taken into that accommodation with them? Do you see that with adolescent people?

Nicole Chaplin:

Absolutely, absolutely we see that, where we see young people, quite often the young men, it's the older adolescent sons that actually cannot be housed with mum and the younger siblings. But even that doesn't come out from that young person for quite a while, but they can't be housed with mum and younger children because of their age and their gender. We certainly have seen it over the years. And I suppose the other implication is young people whether they be young women or young men if

they're under the age of 18 that's a struggle for services as well, adult services and domestic violence services to actually have young people in accommodation when they're under 18. There's a real hesitancy around the legal matters of having someone under 18.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And so on that note, is there much availability in South Australia of housing services or other support really for young people experiencing or at risk of domestic and family violence?

Nicole Chaplin:

Very little. I'm sure you heard of the Alliance of the beds they have across the metro area and then St. John's has you know 23 apartments in Port Adelaide and 30 apartments in crisis apartments in the city but actually those services are getting quite clogged because there's nowhere else for young people to go we're really struggling with exits you know and I get that if you're a real estate agent and have the choice of putting two people in their late 20s into accommodation, to two young people that are 18, just trying to find their way, studying and working part-time. Of course, the older people will win out on that competition because it's very much a competition right across Australia. I don't think that's unique in South Australia. But I'd like to point out that actually, accommodation for young people, they are young people, so they need adult support, mentoring, coaching, so just giving a young person a house doesn't mean that they will be successful. They need that wraparound support for them to achieve their greatness, not the greatness we want for them but the greatness they want for themselves.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And what do you see as the impact on these young people not to have those services available to them?

Nicole Chaplin:

Well you know, they quite often drop out of school or very spasmodic attendance at high school and then that just limits their prospects moving forward for further education, for employment and just for them feeling good about themselves and being a contributing member of our society. It has huge long-term impacts on young people that have missed opportunities because I think every young person has the opportunity to succeed and do great things if as a community we wrap around and we support them.

Katie-Jane Orr:

You've talked about needing adult supports around them and stability, I don't think you used the word, but it's probably implicit in what you're saying about stability, in order for them to set themselves up as you've been talking about. What about young people who feel like they don't have anywhere to go? Do they then turn to unsafe situations?

Nicole Chaplin:

Very unsafe. I've been known to advocate, when we use that word unsafe when we're talking about young people, actually they're at risk of dying, they're at risk of sexual assault and I think someone this morning talked about they kind of use their bank of resources, couch surfing, but when all that runs out they have things to turn to that are quite often unlawful, to get an income, to find a place to live and they're really put at risk and therefore more trauma impacts that young person.

Katie-Jane Orr:
I want to move to the Foyer. So you've mentioned Foyer Port Adelaide and I understand, well can you tell us about the Foyer Foundation first of all?
Nicole Chaplin:
So the Foyer Foundation is a national organisation that works with all foyers and foyers, not just existing foyers but communities that want foyers across Australia and we're advocating to the Commonwealth Government and to the State Government because we believe foyers across Australia are a really great option for young people experiencing homelessness that need connection to education, employment and community.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So I'm going to ask you to tell us what this Youth Foyer is, but is it correct that it's developed in accordance with this model, which is the Foyer model? So the Foyer Foundation has developed standards of practise and accreditation for this model?
Nicole Chaplin:
Yes, absolutely. St John's Youth Services is about to go into its third cycle of accreditation. We were one of the first accredited Foyer in Australia. There was five that went through the first time but yes we're about to go through our third. And being in the sector for you know 25 years I've been a big part of accreditation. I know how to tick the boxes of accreditation. Foyer accreditation is very unique when it's about practise, it's about actually how we work with young people, it's quite a unique, so that and that's about building a quality system to ensure that foyers that are created and built across Australia meet that standard, because we're very passionate about having quality foyers.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So on that note, tell us about the youth foyers.
Nicole Chaplin:
Okay, the youth foyers. And I've been known over the years to say it's not actually rocket science. We kind of make a deal with young people. We go, okay, are you ready to engage in education, employment, training and community? And it's about them deciding what that looks like. So whether that be high school, TAFE, university, working part-time, casually, full-time, for the South Australian Foyer it's all those options. They go, okay, if you're ready to do that, we're ready to support you by providing you accommodation, but also providing you with the wraparound services to motivate, coach you to live that life of greatness that I talked about earlier. And it's on each individual young person's wants. So we've had young people from, you know, right through from working in hospo, and that's actually their career to people that you know we amazing how many young people have worked through the Port Adelaide Foyer that are actually now police officers and social workers and teachers you know in the help what I would call the helping field and then we have people working in childcare and so it's this and mechanics and this whole you know range of you know and they all talk about would we have gotten there if it wasn't for Foyer I'd like to think they do, but we do provide support, but these are all very amazing, resilient young people, as all young people, you know, it's the joy of being a young person, that you're resilient and tough and like to take risks.

Katie-Jane Orr:
And so I think you said before, the Foyer is at Port Adelaide? And what is that service there?
Nicole Chaplin:
So 23 apartments and they're individual apartments. We're quite unique in Australia that actually young people lease those apartments directly from the South Australian Housing Trust.
Katie-Jane Orr:
Okay.
Nicole Chaplin:
So they're, quite often across Australia, it's with a community housing provider, but actually, 12 years ago, the South Australian government invested in Foyer Port Adelaide. Back then, it was called Ladder, St. Vincent Street, so anyone that's watching live stream might remember it by that name. So 23 individual apartments, so it's only one person can stay there, but it is their home. So young people can have visitors at any time, and visitors can stay over, But if we start seeing a visitor there three or four nights a week, we'll have a chat going, hey, you know, remember this is your, this is part of your deal, that this is your home. And that is certainly one of our, because I need to be really honest, we have young people that move into the service that are quite often, I would say at any given time we have at least two young people in the service that are either the perpetrators of violence or the survivor of violence. So that one-person apartment live-in is actually a really good mechanism for us to ensure that we can help that young person build a healthy relationship with the person that they're in a violent relationship with. You know, and there's a whole range of great things that, you know, because it's not just violent relationships, it might be, you know, all the things parents curse about their children getting hooked up with the wrong people. we have a great mechanism to support young people to disengage and sometimes it is that. I've been known to ban a young person from entering the building and that's because a young woman has said I've had enough I want to leave this relationship so we've had the power to say actually that person's no longer allowed in the building. So being really open but that's really open conversations with young people in the whole building. We don't break confidentiality but you know the young people talk to each other and they all rally in support because the community's not just being part of the whole Port Adelaide community, it's part of being that community at Foyer Port Adelaide.
Katie-Jane Orr:
and you spoke about wraparound services. So what services are being provided to the young people?
Nicole Chaplin:
So, classic case management, I suppose, is a key factor, but I think the difference in our service is that sense of community within the building. So monthly they have what we call tenant meetings, so it's about they all come together and talk about what great things they want to do in the future or what's, you know, they're not happy with right now, whether that's not happy with St John's or happy with the community. We normally, depending on what's happening in the building, because we kind of go, well, if we've got 18 young people that are working and going to school, they probably haven't got a lot of capacity to be doing group activities. But if we have a

group at the time that has capacity, we do a range of activities from, you know, helping them do their tax return, to having sexual health conversations, to doing fun things like going to the movies or 10-pin bowling. It's about that balance, not all being serious and them always having to learn something, because the learning from doing things together is also great.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And is that learning designed obviously to provide support but to help these young people to live independently?

Nicole Chaplin:

Absolutely. Foyer Youth110, we work really hard that that building reflects what it will look like for them to be living in community. So if they moved into a block of townhouses, if they party hard on a weekend, well actually their neighbours are going to ring SAPOL and that's actually what happens at Foyer Port Adelaide. If we have a complaint about young people. We advise the other people in the community, you ring SAPOL, but because also it's a South Australian Housing Trust community, they also can put in a disruptive tenancy. And the plus is that we might sometimes, if we actually see it's gone across the line, St John's as a part of that community might also put in a disruptive tenancy or talk to the police about concerns we have in the building.

Katie-Jane Orr:

How many youth Foyers are there?

Nicole Chaplin:

There's 11 across the state, with another 13, I think, in the pipeline.

Katie-Jane Orr:

You said state, but do you mean nationally?

Nicole Chaplin:

Oh, sorry, nationally, 11 nationally. One in this state. Nationally, 11. I think 16 are in the pipeline. I'm thinking of moving to Queensland because they're about to open eight in Queensland. The state government there made an announcement and apparently the new government is saying they will honour that commitment. But the vision for Foyer Foundation and for all of the members of Foyer which is what we call the group that are advocating for more foyers. It's 50 foyers by 2030 is our aim. Very ambitious, but we're all working hard to make it happen.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And how many in South Australia? One. And I think you said it's one of the first.

Nicole Chaplin:

Yes, one of the first, yes.

Katie-Jane Orr:

So obviously this is... Sorry, one more question before I ask that. Do you work with other organisations?

Nicole Chaplin:

Oh, absolutely. That is what community is about. And we are a small, I suppose in the homelessness sector, we're quite a small organisation. In the big picture of things, we're not. You know, we're a $3.5 million organisation with 38 employees and most of them do shift work. So, you know, it's a very small team of 9 to 5 workers. So we have no choice but to work with others. And I am certainly at that strategic level, I'm on the board of, I'm on Olive's board, I'm also on SACOSS's board, I'm very

involved in all the peak bodies and that's about advocating for young people and their needs in the homelessness sector.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And how long do the tenants or the young people stay in that Foyer accommodation?

Nicole Chaplin:

So nationally, it can be up to two years. Our Foyer in South Australia, due to the leasing arrangements with South Australian Housing Trust, when young people move in it's a 12-month lease. But knowing that, if someone moves in and they're 16, we're not going to move them out when they're 17, halfway through their year 12. So St John's actually says to Housing Trust, no, can you extend it six months or nine months or, you know, we also don't kick someone out on Christmas Eve, that's not how you work with young people. So it's actually really quite open. So the younger cohort quite often do stay close to two years because it's just what makes sense, because younger young people need more time to settle and establish their routines.

Katie-Jane Orr:

And then where do they go afterwards?

Nicole Chaplin:

Where do they go? Well, I do have a lovely story about a young person who certainly supported me and has been an ambassador over the years. His family life, there was some domestic violence in that family life and that's why he came to us. And he did great things, got a full-time job, moved into share accommodation and has been doing that. You know, it was probably four years ago now since he was with us. And I suppose that's another element. We quite often stay in touch with young people. they see us as, you know, they come back to tell us their amazing things, they also come back to say, help. But this young person actually came back to say, my share house, there's an empty house, is there anyone here at Foyer that's ready for a share accommodation? So amazing, we did have someone that was, you know, they could have stayed longer at Foyer because in this environment people are staying a bit longer because of the housing crisis. But that young person moved and we supported that young person and the rest of the house to make sure, because that's the other big thing we like to do, we don't just go, oh okay, off you go, go find a share accommodation. We go in, make sure they've got the right tenancy agreement and continue that support. Because as we all know, when you share with other human beings, there's a bumpy ride and these young people quite often, the only adults they've got in their life is us to actually support that bumpy, bumpy ride. So we do that. We normally do about, normally only six weeks, but if people need longer, we do, you know, again, it's about individual young people. We, you know, tailor the support to that young person. So it could be anything from six weeks to six months after they move out of Foyer. But most exits, St John's, you know, it's getting harder and harder to do, but St John's really wants young people to move into the private rental market. We actually want them to sever all ties to the welfare system so that they're not on Centrelink payments, they're not in community housing or social housing, that they're working, they're contributing via their tax and all the things that every citizen strives to do

Katie-Jane Orr:
Yeah, I understand that the Foyers have been evaluated, that system has been evaluated? and this is nationally. Yes. Do you have the statistics or would you like me to? So I understand from the evaluation nationally that 80 % of Foyer residents exit into safe, stable housing, 65 % gain secure, decent employment and they are 60 % less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. So does that accord with your...
Nicole Chaplin:
Yes, absolutely. And I suppose the other piece of evidence from that evaluation is that for every dollar spent at a Foyer, $6 is saved, $3 to federal government and $3 to state government saving across that social welfare, justice, health system, which is a significant saving, a dollar, you know, I'd be pretty happy if for every dollar I spent I saved $6.
Katie-Jane Orr:
So that's a prevention type tool, a reflection of the prevention I guess. I have no further questions.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Thank you. Thank you for your evidence. I'm interested, let's start with the dollars because you've just given us a really good advertisement for your good work. Have you approached the State Government for additional funding?
Nicole Chaplin:
We've just started that process. So yes, we've had one meeting and I've got to say DHS and South Australian Housing Trust are both very willing to talk and have both said to me the outcomes of Foyer Port Adelaide speak to themselves. So they're welcoming the conversations of what it can look like. And Foyer Foundation is approached by the Federal, so we're looking for capital from Federal and operations from State.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
What about the private sector?
Nicole Chaplin:
Yes I have had a couple of meetings with a couple of major philanthropists in this state that are interested. Once we've got kind of the ducks lined up, they've offered to support me in writing an application to their Board for significant philanthropic, you know, but they kind of want the commitment from the state and the federal before they'll hand over some money, which is fair enough. They want to ensure their investment and the Foyer Foundation is exploring social impact bonds, please don't ask me too many questions about that, that's not my area of expertise, but certainly, you know, because we've got the example of Aspire in Adelaide, South Australia that was in its social impact bond, which I think is still funded this year through Hutt Street, so certainly exploring those options nationally, not just in this state.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
I understand that you've helped around 264 young people and the largest proportion is under 18?
Nicole Chaplin:
Yes.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
Do we know what happens to that cohort that is under 16? Apart from, obviously, young people who might be accompanying relatives. What about the family unit?
Nicole Chaplin:
So the shelters that the Alliance has talked about this morning, they do take 15 year olds. I suppose the struggle with Foyers and even our Crisis Accommodation Service, because they're independent apartments, young people need to be able to live independently. We've got on-site staff for support, but not one-on-one, you know, 23 apartments, workers cannot be there for every young person helping them cook dinner. Certainly do groups together to cook dinner together and certainly when we identify a person has no idea how to cook and that happens. Although most young people know, they might not know how to cook a 10 person dinner party, but they do know how to cook. They're not the only ones. So you know, when we identify young people that actually really need some upskilling around that, of course we step in and help them and do that with them in their apartment. But that 15 year old, they actually still do need a bit more of a family environment, which is what the shelters give. It's congregate living, people cook for them, they're made to go to school. So St John's Youth Services did run shelters for 35 years, we know what they look like and they have their place for that younger cohort. But also once, I think you heard this morning, when young people turn 18 they can no longer stay at a shelter. And at 18 and one day, they're sometimes not ready to live completely independently. I think most of us know our young people live at home a lot longer than they once did. I think the average age is 28 now.
Natasha Stott Despoja AO:
How do you determine someone's eligibility for the Foyer? I mean, I'm assuming that supply and demand, you know, supply is outstripped by demand. Is it first in? Is it an assessment of risk? Is it...
Nicole Chaplin:
It's about whether young person is ready, willing and able to engage in the programme. We have a couple of ways, so we have a couple of self-referrals we will take any day of the week. If a young person sends us a referral, or a family member does, we will assess that, meet with the young person so when a vacancy comes up. We do have fairly good turnover, like about 15 people a year move out, so that means 15 people a year can move in. So it's more than, you know, not much more than half, but it's a bit more than half of the community move out. But then the other thing we do is we have a very long referral distribution list. When we have a vacancy coming up, we send that out to everyone, and that includes schools, SAPOL, other homelessness services, hospitals, DCP, a whole range of people. You just have to ask and you get put on the list so everyone has the opportunity to put their people in but yes we have this huge you know, it’s nothing for us to have a hundred applications for one apartment and then it's about our team goes through them and has a look at you know and we look for support other than not so much the self referrals but if organisations refer and we ask will you still stay involved and what are the supports so it's quite a complicated it is quite a complicated process because we really want to get young people that will make the most of the opportunity and we don't want to set young people up to fail. That's kind of our first rule. Compared to our crisis accommodation where it's actually if you're staying in a hotel or you're

sleeping rough you're in. That's not how our Foyer works. They're actually there for a minimum of 12 months and so we don't want them to set up, set them up to fail.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Well, the numbers that you're talking about in terms of referrals or the applications suggest that if you had the capital and the infrastructure you could be servicing many more.

Nicole Chaplin:

Yeah, and maybe stop them actually entering that chronic homelessness cycle as well. Because I do worry about that, and that's from our experience running the shelters, that young people quite often can get, they think it's what they deserve, and no young person, well no person deserves homelessness, but never mind a young person with their whole future ahead of them, they do not deserve that cycle of homelessness.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

When we talk about the assessment of those individuals, you've obviously referred to education, training, other career opportunities, employment. That factors into, I mean it's not a necessity.

Nicole Chaplin:

No, they don't have to be engaged in it now, but what we want to hear about is what would they like to be engaged in, what are they good about, so we're very much, Foyers use what is called advantage thinking which actually about building on someone's strengths and what also happens is people young people move funny enough they move they think they want to do this and month and two months later when they've tested that they kind of go no I'm not sure if that's what I want to do so that is part of being a young person testing the waters so as long as they can during their the referral process and so we get about a hundred roughly between 70 and 100 depending on you know what's going on, referrals, we would probably interview about 20 young people for that one apartment. And in that interview, we give them great opportunity to talk to us about what their dreams are. But we also understand they're not going to tell us everything at that. But it starts setting up that really trusting relationship at that very beginning. And if they don't get in, often we look at what could have happened, what could have looked different that we would have accepted you over another person and also we look at how do we refer them. You know our crisis service quite often accepts referrals after they've been to that Foyer interview because Foyer works out actually their sleep, they're really unsafe, they're not expressing that when they ring Homeless Connect but they are actually really unsafe so they do a direct referral into our crisis accommodation.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Thank you for that. I've got one last question. It was interesting hearing you talk about and also Ms Matthews earlier, the different cognitive abilities and understanding and the expressions of young people when it comes to feeling safe or unsafe. But also you mentioned the difference, young people witnessing violence or being, should we be changing or framing things differently, because a child that witnesses violence, is that not experiencing violence?

Nicole Chaplin:

It is experiencing. I was only having a conversation today, you know, what are we going to do about our young boys in crime? And I know it's a big national

conversation, but when young children boys or girls witness violence, they're experiencing They're learning And we certainly have worked with a number of young men over the years and it's very difficult to engage them in in therapeutic conversations about their behaviour towards women is violent and inappropriate, they kind of go, no, no, this is how we do it. This is how I communicate with women. So really, really difficult. So I think, yes, when children and young people witness violence, they're experiencing. They internalise it, it traumatise them, it becomes normal, absolutely. And, you know, and I'm sure you've received many personal submissions that women also, and young women, kind of, until they come to some realisation, also think they deserve that violence and they believe that that's what they deserve and that's what normal relationships look like. And we, as a community, need to say no, that is not what, and we need to set up systems Because it's certainly a system issue, but not having enough accommodation for young people is certainly setting them up to fail and we will have another generation of homeless people, the numbers will keep rising if we don't stop the flow with young people.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Thank you for that. I think you've managed to cover the terms of reference from prevention right through to service provision and other things. Thank you for your testimony today.

Katie-Jane Orr:

Thank you. I ask that the witness could be excused.

Natasha Stott Despoja AO:

Thank you. You're absolutely free to go. Well, that wraps up today's hearings. And we will adjourn and then return tomorrow morning. Thank you, everyone.

END OF TRANSCRIPT