**2nd Australian Universal Design Conference**

**Transcript of the Panel Session: The Economics of Inclusion**

**Minor edits by Jane Bringolf**

**Panel Members** were Ms Ro Coroneos, Lendlease; Ms Sally Coddington, Curb Cut Effect, The Hon Kelly Vincent MLC, South Australia, and Mr Paul Nunnari, Department of Premier and Cabinet (NSW).

THE HON. KELLY VINCENT:

As law maker, as a member of parliament, I'm often asked to justify the economic cost of inclusion, in this case universal design, what does it cost us to include these people over there, what are these people going to cost us? What is more interesting and important to me and I think should be more interesting and important to all of us is what it costs us to exclude these people. When I say "these people", I'm using that obviously as an umbrella term, it's rude, but it serves as a short form. But what does it cost us to exclude people who have any variety of access needs. I wanted to share a few examples of my constituent case file in my office, not in any great detail and would never do that without permission, but I want you to imagine these examples.

In the area of education, I know of an 8‑year‑old boy with autism who has what are labelled very challenging behaviours. As a result, he has been essentially excluded from the education system. So what happens to him now? What happens to his literacy level, to his chances for independence, to his life opportunities, his chances for employment, his chances for life skills, to be able to do his own shopping, all of those things that many of us can take for granted we learn from school? What happens if he misses out for one month, what happens if he misses out for one year, what happens if he never returns to the education system? What will that cost us in terms of the extra supports that he might need as a result of that far into his future? And of course my work also shows me that unfortunately many people who are excluded from the education system either part time or permanently often have a higher rate of interaction with the justice system because there is nobody there to help them learn more positive behaviours, more autonomy in their behaviours, more skills for self‑regulation and that kind of thing, which leads them to continue exhibiting or using those same behaviours as coping mechanisms in our life, which can lead to some interaction with the criminal justice system due to what is labelled inappropriate behaviour in adulthood. So that's one thought to leave with you.

On the issue of housing, I know of a 30‑year‑old woman with a physical disability and some other complications to her health who stayed in hospital an extra year. So a year after being medically fit for discharge she remained in hospital basically because of the way that government departments operate in silos. So rather than the disability services department come and install the grab rails or provide that extra support work she needed to return to her family home, it's easier for them, it doesn't affect their KPIs, if that person remains in the hospital department responsibility, where of course the hospital department pays for the hospital service.

The hospital bill for that extra time was estimated to be somewhere around $450,000. I don't need to tell you that that could have built her a house from the ground up. So what does it cost us to not allow that person's independence? And also what is the cost to their mental health and potentially being excluded from family and friend life, and employment, by having to remain in hospital? I'm sure we would all agree that they are not the best places to be for your mental health or even sometimes for your physical health. What does it cost not only to that person in her personal life, but to us as a society, as an economy?

In the area of justice, what is the cost when an alleged victim, alleged offender or witness can't use our justice system because no communication aid or alternative supports are put in place? For example, I'm aware of a case that occurred in recent years in South Australia that became known as the Christies Beach Case or Bus Mums Case. This was the case of 7 young people with varying levels of intellectual disability who were allegedly sexually abused by their school bus driver, but their case never stood up in court because of their level of disability. At that time the disability justice plan was not underway and so there were no supports for them to communicate their evidence in court. As a result the case fell over in court.

Now, of course can I say with absolute certainty that we would have reached a conviction had those supports been in place? Of course I can't, but not having their day in court really had an impact on those families. And then there is the difficulty in fighting for support services because they haven't necessarily been proven to be victims. They've had to fight for a lot of supports that they have now received, but certainly should not have to have fought as hard as they did.

For those young people that were allegedly abused, the impact on their behaviours, everything from not being able to tolerate physical touch to not being able to shower more frequently than once a week, to perhaps even mimicking some of the behaviours that they allegedly witnessed from the alleged abuser. So the impact, that neglect, is far reaching.

The underlying question is what is the cost of NOT implementing access for all?