

## YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT — MIRRABOOKA

### *Grievance*

**MS J.M. FREEMAN (Mirrabooka)** [9.46 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Youth. I have repeatedly raised in this house the impact of unemployment in the Mirrabooka–Balga area. I am particularly concerned about youth unemployment. The minister would be aware that I asked the Minister for Training and Workforce Development, in a question without notice, why, despite a Brotherhood of St Laurence report identifying the Perth–north west zone—which includes the electorate of Mirrabooka—as a youth unemployment hotspot, the government continues to fail young people. This Liberal government inherited an unemployment rate of 2.7 per cent, and now the environment is much worse for young people. This government has lost its way on unemployment, particularly youth unemployment.

The December 2015 unemployment figures illustrate this. One in four people are now unemployed in the Mirrabooka–Balga area. There are 2 445 people looking for work in those two suburbs. That is an increase of 848 from September 2014, when I began raising this issue. Alarm bells should have been ringing in September when the unemployment rate sat at 16.4 per cent; yet nothing has been done and now we have an appalling unemployment rate of 24.3 per cent. The Minister for Youth cannot and should not reject this figure as being of no consequence because the rate is overwhelmingly made up of young people he should be assisting to build a better future through employment. If it is not the Minister for Youth’s role to address youth unemployment, I would have to ask whose it is. Based on 2016 figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, youth unemployment has now hit a high of 16.4 per cent in the Perth–north west zone—the highest in Western Australia. It is now higher than when the Brotherhood of St Laurence document “Australia’s Youth Unemployment Hotspots Snapshot” reported it as being 14.5 per cent in the January 2016 figures, designating Perth–north west as WA’s youth unemployment hotspot.

Youth unemployment data is compiled as a regional profile. The seat of Mirrabooka falls into the Perth–north west labour force regional area profile. That area starts at Yanchep and goes down to Osborne Park and across to a line along Alexander Drive. The make-up of the Perth–north west youth unemployment figure of 16.4 per cent gives a skewed view of the unemployment problem in certain areas because many of the suburbs in the north west have unemployment rates that sit below the unemployment average of 5.5 per cent. Effectively, it brings down the overall rate. For example, the north west area includes Duncraig, which has an overall unemployment rate of 2.3 per cent, as well as Hillarys at 2.4 per cent, Ocean Reef at 2.3 per cent, Kingsley at 3.1 per cent and Scarborough at 3.5 per cent. Out of the approximately 50 suburbs in the Perth–north west zone that make up this concerning rate of 16.4 per cent youth unemployment, the greatest impact of the lack of opportunities for young people in Western Australia is in the Mirrabooka–Balga area, which has a 24.3 per cent unemployment rate. The unemployment rate in Nollamara–Westminster is 12.5 per cent and it is 16.4 per cent in the Alexander Heights–Koondoola area. To add to this, the population of the Mirrabooka electorate has a mean age of 31 years; that is five years younger than the state’s mean average of 36 years. The bulk of the unemployment rate in the area therefore affects young people. This means that young people like Luke James Manley, at 20 years of age living in Koondoola, face a daily struggle to gain employment. Having found casual employment with Red Rooster when he was 18, the position is now no longer available to him given his age. Having left school early due to medical issues, Luke was optimistic that he would receive further certificate II or certificate III training that would result in employment in security. Despite identifying the course at a private training provider to gain a certificate II in security operation that would best suit him given his educational background, the cost of the course was beyond his means and he was not offered advice on how to access the course. Instead, following advice from job network agencies and TAFE, he enrolled in an information technology course at TAFE. It was beyond his skill level and has undermined his confidence as he could not continue it. Currently, Luke is in receipt of sickness payments due to anxiety and depression as a result of his current situation but he is keen to seize the opportunity to be appropriately trained in security to become employed. Someone like Luke would have benefited from the very successful Youth Connections program that this government failed to fund subsequent to the federal Liberal government’s abolition of its funding in 2014.

Youth are now left stranded between an argument over who takes responsibility and no agreement that both levels of government need to act. With an 80 per cent success rate of young people in employment or study after 18 months of finishing the Youth Connections program at an average cost of just \$2 750, this government should make Youth Connections or a similar program available to young people like Luke. Such a program that works with young people and companies to ensure placement would see Mubruk employed. On completion of his certificate III in hospitality, Mubruk has been so desperate for an opportunity for work that he actively volunteers in the community in Mirrabooka. But unpaid volunteering, although valuable, is not what he needs; he needs work. Odette and Modess are also keen to build their futures as a cabinet-maker and electrician respectively. They embarked on pre-apprenticeships but they are concerned, like many others in the community, that they will not be offered apprenticeships at the completion of their courses. How is this government assisting

these young people to make the connections they need to get work experience and then an apprenticeship that will lead to lifelong employment? In response to a question from the member for Belmont at one stage, the minister praised the services for youth in her area, yet the services in the area I represent report a continual battle to find ongoing funding to support young people in the community into employment. This support would lead them to feel confident to access education and employment and provide direct support to assist them to make links into employment.

I implore the minister to tell me, outside the cadets program, what his department and his government are doing to stem the growing youth unemployment problem. Do not handball the problem to the federal government and rely on political grandstanding around current policy debates; I want the minister to tell me what he is doing for the young people of WA, with his responsibility as the Minister for Youth. I conclude by reminding the minister that there are clear associations between high youth unemployment rates and antisocial behaviour that put young people, as well as other community members, at risk.

**MR A.J. SIMPSON (Darling Range — Minister for Youth)** [9.53 am]: I thank the member for Mirrabooka for her grievance. Rightly, she raised some very good concerns to do with youth unemployment not only throughout Western Australia but also in her electorate. I take on board the diversity of the electorate of Mirrabooka including linguistic, social and cultural changes that also have a big impact on unemployment. They are always hard struggles to overcome. I acknowledge the great work that has been done in the wider hemisphere of trying to bring down unemployment rates in general, but also youth unemployment. The member touched on Luke's story. Leaving school early and some other parameters that were out of his control is a classic example. From where people like Luke end up, it is always hard to get back into the job cycle, especially at the age of 20. As the member pointed out, as the Minister for Youth I know we run a number of programs to try to make sure that we can engage with youth. Future Skills WA provides a guaranteed subsidised training place and I take on board that eligible students enrol in courses there. The member pointed out that, through that process, Luke was taking a course that was possibly a little bit out of his range for what he was trying to achieve.

The government's building training policy aims to increase the overall numbers of apprentices and trainees in the building and construction industry. The last two years has been a really interesting time. The Minister for Housing tells me that nearly 30 000 houses were built each year. Of course, this year, with a bit of a downturn, that number will not be built and consequently, not as many cabinet-makers and electricians will be needed. As the Minister for Youth, I could stand here and go through a raft of things that I am doing to make sure that we engage with youth. Annually, my department funds over \$1.2 million in services but it is more around the cadets, scouts, guides, brigades and Duke of Edinburgh awards, which are fantastic programs. There are quite a few in the northern metropolitan region that are going a long way. The federal government has committed to the Youth Jobs PaTH program and an extension of that includes initiatives, new schemes and entrepreneurial stuff as well.

I take on board the member's issues with unemployment. I think it is important to look at how we can best possibly address that. As not only the Minister for Youth but also the Minister for Local Government, I took on board an interesting point that the member raised. She mentioned some facts about the average age and also the younger generation she has within her electorate. There is a similar role within Local Government, which has done a review of the average workforce of local government. We have identified that there is an ageing population and a lack of younger people taking up careers in local government. Through royalties for regions funding, just the other week we announced a program for traineeships and an initiative to promote younger people into local government jobs.

**Ms J.M. Freeman:** Will that only be in the regions, though, or will it be in Mirrabooka as well, in the City of Stirling and the City of Wanneroo?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** No, we are trying to work through and identify where we can put more young people into regional Western Australia as well. My point is that we are looking at initiatives that are something a bit different, outside the square.

More importantly, I think that the government's training sector reform collaboration has done a fair bit of work. Since 2008, this government has put a huge amount—millions and millions of dollars—into infrastructure jobs and growth. I think it is fine to say all that but with the economy where it is today, the fact is that the slight downturn means growth in construction is down a bit. However, we are pushing to make—as members will see in the budget that is coming down at two o'clock this afternoon—a great commitment to more construction and job opportunities. We understand that, more than ever, the government has to make sure that it puts money into infrastructure to create jobs, which will have a ripple effect further out, including on youth unemployment. That is an issue we have right across the sector. I take on board the member's issues to do with some federal government funding of training and that partnership. We have to make sure we do that and it is also important for me as Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth. The member touched on volunteering, which is one of the key issues I talk about with youth. If they can become involved in volunteering, it is certainly

a good pathway. It looks good on people's résumés if they are doing volunteering work when they apply for jobs, so it is very important to make sure they do that.

I take on board the member's concerns about the youth unemployment rate in Mirrabooka. This government is fully committed to try to ensure that we combat not only youth unemployment where we can, but also unemployment in general throughout the state. I thank the member for her grievance.