

ACTIV FOUNDATION — LARGE-SCALE INDUSTRIAL WORKSITE CLOSURES

396. Mr H.T. JONES to the Minister for Disability Services:

On behalf of the member for Jandakot, I would like to welcome Ms Margaret Dull, the secretary, and her team from the Papua New Guinea Association of WA to Parliament House today. They were recently in the Speaker's gallery, but they have departed.

I refer to Activ Foundation's announcement last month that it would close its large-scale industrial worksites in Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the McGowan Labor government worked with the Australian government to develop a support package enabling these employment workshops to remain open for 18 months?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house what this will mean for the 750-plus employees who would have been affected by Activ's decision?

Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:

I thank the member for Darling Range for his question.

- (1)–(2) Last month, Activ Foundation publicly announced that it was closing its large-scale sites across Western Australia that supported people with intellectual disability. It was a traumatic decision. It was traumatically received. It blindsided both the people who participate in those programs and their families. That was the first time employees at Activ had actually heard about the decision. Many families—including my colleague the member for Darling Range, whose son was directly impacted by the decision—have reached out to the state government for assistance and to express their anxiety over the pending closures.

Let us not forget, members, that the financial responsibility for enterprise programs rests firmly with the commonwealth. The former Morrison government sat on the issue for months and chose to ignore the pleas of Activ and the requests of the state government to act on this issue. Immediately following the swearing in of the new federal government, the Premier and I began working with Prime Minister Albanese, the new Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Bill Shorten, and the Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth, to identify options to provide more time for supported employees at Activ to transition to alternative options—not the six weeks that Activ was offering, but a longer period so that people could absorb, control, manage themselves and feel that they were actually in charge of what their futures might be. That was the McGowan government's top priority with the incoming government, and I am very pleased to say that those incoming federal ministers were very positive in hearing our views. We remain committed to ensuring that the Activ workshops will not close down with no weeks of notice given to supported employees and their families.

Over the weekend, the federal and state governments, together, announced they would provide up to \$11.8 million to keep Activ worksites open for a further 18 months and, more importantly, to better support the transition of participants into new placements. The Albanese Labor government is providing \$7.8 million to keep Activ open for up to 18 months and the McGowan government is providing \$4 million to support other Australian disability enterprises, known as ADEs, in Western Australia to assist with that transition.

A joint commonwealth–state task force will also be created to support employees, their families, advocates, employers and peak bodies to help manage that significant transition. That transition is absolutely significant in the lives of those 750 participants and their families. The task force will work to identify the individual needs of all 750 supported employees currently at Activ and to find suitable alternatives before the closure of those Activ worksites. Nobody will be left behind. I say this hoping it provides comfort to those families and participants who have been traumatised over these last few weeks. It is an incredibly stressful period for them. I, as I am sure many members of this house have, heard those personal stories from a number of people. I am committed to finding the right solutions for all those 750 employees, and I am confident this can be done with goodwill and collaboration between the state and federal governments and the sector.

For some individuals, supported employment at other Western Australian disability enterprises may be their goal. Others may wish to explore options available in open employment. Some older supported employees have indicated the desire to retire once Activ closes, and we will work with them to make sure that they can maintain social and community contact if that is their choice. The state government funding of \$4 million will support other ADEs in Western Australia to provide sustainable, supported employment services for existing employees and to extend opportunities to former Activ employees as appropriate.

I want to acknowledge here the work that the other ADEs have been doing to date, working with the National Disability Insurance Scheme in WA since the announcement was made by Activ. I understand that, collectively, those ADEs have advised that they can take up to 230 Activ supported employees immediately. I know that some employees have already made the transition into new roles. Yesterday, I met Eric and his dad, Graham, at Good Sammy's. Eric will be the first of many employees to move into supported employment from Activ to a similar role at Good Sammy's that addresses his personal preferences and his vision for his future. It is hard to describe in this place the emotion I felt from his dad and from Eric. I could tell how important this issue is for them and it is not the sort of issue that can be dealt with as a straightforward closure of a major industry. For the employees in this circumstance, it is their whole life. It is a very different qualitative issue.

I would like to thank the Albanese government for the work it has done and for its collaboration. It has moved quickly and nimbly. It is alleviating stress and it is also setting out a work program for the next 18 months, and I look forward to the discussions with the sector and with Australian disability enterprises to make sure we can collectively find the best options for those 750 people.