

ABORIGINAL IN-HOME SUPPORT SERVICE — PEEL REGION

556. Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to keeping children safe and efforts to ensure that they are connected to their families and their community. Can the minister outline to the house how the expansion of the Aboriginal in-home support service will assist vulnerable families living in the Peel region?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

This government is very much committed to keeping children safe. I look forward to debating the improvements to the working with children check scheme in Western Australia this afternoon, and, of course, the Parliament recently passed the reportable conduct scheme. Both are important recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The government has also invested record amounts into early intervention to prevent children coming into our child protection system, and we have had some very good results. In fact, one of the signature policies and programs that we have put in place is the Aboriginal in-home support service. This service will give contracts to Aboriginal-controlled organisations that work with Aboriginal families whose children are at risk of coming into the child protection system or, in fact, have come into the child protection system. The Department of Communities and its partner organisations are working to reunite the children with their families.

We have provided nearly \$30 million of new funding for early intervention since coming into government. I was very pleased to be with the member for Murray–Wellington and the member for Dawesville when we met with Wungening Aboriginal Corporation representatives and local Department of Communities staff to extend the Aboriginal in-home support service to the Peel area. We have had some great results with that service. As at June 2022, 89 per cent of the WA families referred to that service have had their children remain at home with them after 12 months. That is quite remarkable. It is great to see that work extend to the Peel area. We are hearing from both the district Child Protection staff and Wungening. As members can imagine, a number of Aboriginal families are wary of dealing with government authorities. They have lots of issues going on in their life. It is good to have a third party come along, particularly an Aboriginal-controlled organisation, and say, “What’s going on? Can we try to get on top of some of these issues?” They have had really good engagement with those families.

Significantly, over the 12 months to June 2022, the number of children in care statewide dropped by 4.7 per cent, which is a reduction in the number of children in care. That includes a reduction of 3.3 per cent of Aboriginal children in care. That measure is one of the new Closing the Gap targets. Over the last 24 months, we have seen consecutive years of reductions in the number of children in care. That is the first reduction since 1997—over a quarter of a century ago. I am very proud of the work that we are doing to help partner with Aboriginal-controlled organisations to work with Aboriginal families. We have had record investment in early intervention, improvement of the capacity both within the Department of Communities and with our partner organisations to keep children safe, where possible to keep them out of the child protection system but if they are there, make sure that we have good partners with Aboriginal-controlled organisations to give children a good sense of their identity, connection with their extended family and with their country.

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition with the last question.

Mr S.A. Millman interjected.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.H. Cook: You got a supplementary there, Simon?

The SPEAKER: I think he may need to leave the chamber if he has a supplementary.