

GRASS ROOTS

Statement

HON SHELLEY ARCHER (Mining and Pastoral) [9.44 pm]: On Thursday, 3 April 2008 I had the pleasure of meeting a number of representatives from a little-known organisation called Grass Roots. I then had the further pleasure of visiting its facility last Sunday with the chief executive officer, Frances Tierney. Grass Roots is an incorporated charitable association founded by parents of children with disabilities and was set up in response to a lack of respite and supported accommodation services for people with disabilities. Membership of the organisation is predominantly made up of parents of children with disabilities. These parents work tirelessly to provide care and a better life for their children. One of the major activities of the Grass Roots organisation is the management of the Holiday Haven village at Jarrahdale. The Holiday Haven spans 17 hectares and is situated 45 kilometres from Perth. It is nestled among the jarrah forest at Jarrahdale and has one of the most spectacular views over the countryside that I have seen in a while. The property offers a variety of accommodation options. There are dormitories, one and two-bedroom cabins and a couple of houses that can accommodate a large family or a group of friends. It can also cater for conferences for more than 100 people at any one time. The facilities at the property include a swimming pool, tennis courts, a cricket net, barbecues, an activity hall and a commercial kitchen. There are also plenty of paths that one can take while exploring the forests that surround this great haven.

This facility presents a much-needed respite service for families of children with disabilities, and the people who use this facility can have disabilities ranging from minor right through to the most severe, as was indicated to me on Sunday when I heard about some of the people who go there on the odd occasion to give their parents some respite. Additionally, the village offers very affordable short-stay services to other organisations, such as CanTeen, Carers WA, the Australian Red Cross, the Disability Services Commission and Indigenous youth organisations. This allows Grass Roots to generate a small income stream with which to further its objectives. These services provide vital opportunities for disadvantaged and highly marginalised young people and their families from across WA to improve their social and emotional wellbeing. Grass Roots currently finds itself in a unique situation, with the owners of Holiday Haven, who are from a Catholic order, having offered to sell it the property exclusively. Purchasing this property would allow the organisation to secure a substantial asset and work towards its ultimate goal of providing independent supported accommodation to people with disabilities. However, as with all charitable endeavours, funding is scarce and the organisation's ability to take advantage of this offer will be highly dependent on its future fundraising activities. On 16 February 2006 the organisation wrote to the Premier asking for assistance to purchase the property. In early 2006 representatives from Grass Roots met with the then Minister for Disability Services, Margaret Quirk. At this meeting the minister advised Grass Roots that the government would not assist with purchasing the property, but would discuss the idea of an interest-free loan with the Treasurer. The CEO, Frances Tierney, has attempted on many occasions to follow up this matter with the minister, but as of Sunday had not received a response. The organisation then approached the Director General of the Disability Services Commission, Mr Ron Chalmers. Unfortunately, no assistance was forthcoming, other than an offer from the director general to speak at any fundraising function that Grass Roots may organise with any business leaders in Western Australia, or even Australia, whom it might be able to attract to a function. At no time did the director general request further information, as indicated by the minister's office in response to question without notice 1663. It seems obvious to me and others that this government is ill-equipped to offer meaningful assistance to well-intentioned organisations such as Grass Roots. Its quest to secure the title of the Jarrahdale property and continue its good work will be in serious jeopardy unless a substantial source of funding becomes available. If money for the purchase price is not raised, unfortunately, the Western Australian public will lose an invaluable respite service, and the many families who have children with disabilities will lose their chance to see much-needed independent living units being provided for their children.

I commend Grass Roots for its dedicated work in improving the lives of children with disabilities, and also for providing other organisations with the ability to hold conferences, meetings and holidays in such a great place. I can only hope that the funding that Grass Roots requires to purchase the Holiday Haven property is realised in the short term. I am not fussed whether that funding is a combination of money from the state and federal governments and private providers. I would appreciate it if the state government would seriously consider supporting such a great organisation.