

HOMELESSNESS — REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Statement

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [6.28 pm]: I rise tonight to speak briefly about homelessness in regional areas. I am very concerned about this, and I had the opportunity to meet with somebody who gave me a lot more information that I want to pass on tonight. In regional WA, one in 10 women have experienced homelessness sometime in the past five years, and that just seems unacceptable. Currently, there are 700 women on the public housing waitlist in the south west alone. In the Augusta–Margaret River area, there are 78 public housing dwellings, but, unfortunately, this is still not enough. We cannot just say that people go to Margaret River when they are homeless because it is a great place to live. Most of these people are long-term residents of Margaret River and for one reason or another they have not been able to maintain their homes.

I would like to draw the attention of the chamber to the WA Labor 2019 platform in which Labor said that it wanted to expand appropriate public housing stock for those in need to six per cent. That percentage is currently at four per cent and the measures that have been announced are not on a scale to get close to that figure. I agree that six per cent is a figure we should aim for; it is what we need and it is what those people deserve. Evidently, Labor has its heart in the right place and I acknowledge that we can get there. This is a growing state and I appreciate the efforts being made, but I hope we can rev them up in some way. I understand also that some other measures have been undertaken recently in Bunbury. I appreciate that some funding has been directed there to help people who are currently homeless and in need, and that is really good to see.

There is a group in Margaret River called Just Home Margaret River, which was established during the last two years or so. It comprises people who live in the community and saw that homelessness was an issue down there. Many of the group's board members have been homeless and some were homeless at the time they were on the board. This is an open, inclusive group that is working with people in Margaret River who, for one reason or another, need a home. This organisation started on a shoestring with volunteers and a few donations, and the shire gave them some funds. Recently, through this COVID period, the shire donated \$30 000, so the group was able to help 19 homeless people find unused accommodation in either hotels or cabins in the area. With the funding from the shire, the group was able to say to the homeless people that if they put 25 per cent of their income into that accommodation, the group would pay the balance. I think the deal involved rates of around \$300 a week for a lot of the accommodation suppliers. It worked. Of the 19 people, I think four or five got a home through the state. A couple of others have been able to rent privately due to receiving the JobSeeker funding, which gives them some cash now. When the funding is cut in September and those people cannot make their rent payments, it will be disastrous. We will have to deal with that in September when that happens. However, for now, a few people have found a home that way, although I think a few have left the area to go somewhere else, but it worked. A community group with the barest amount of funding was able to help people who were homeless to find a place to live. Think about it: if you were living in your car or staying at a friend's place while trying to find a place, especially if you have small children, it would not be very easy.

The group is now looking for further support and that is why I was pleased to see that the government is providing support, through programs in Rockingham and, as I said, in Bunbury. I hope that Just Home Margaret River can be seen as a potential pilot program. For a small amount of funding, this group can assist people to not just find a home but also deal with the large range of government services that are available, but usually in Busselton or Bunbury, which is difficult for people to get to if they do not have a car, and many homeless people do not have a car. This small service that the group provides helps homeless people fill in appropriate forms to get them through the system. The group has applied to the shire, which I think will help out the group. It has applied also to Lotterywest. In addition, some state funding would go a long way towards helping this organisation continue doing the good work it does. If the Minister for Housing could possibly go to Margaret River and meet people in the group to find out how they operate, a similar group could be set up in other smaller communities.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Honourable member, I'm sure if they invited the Minister for Housing, he would consider that.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Thank you, that is a great suggestion. I will put that to the group.

In a region where there is up to a 10-year waitlist for public housing and housing is unaffordable for 63 per cent of residents, Just Home Margaret River is advocating for projects and policies to ensure housing justice for people across the Augusta–Margaret River region. As I represent the whole south west, I would like to see it spread throughout the south west.

I have to say that the Greens are working towards a future in which no-one will experience homelessness. I know it is an ideal and it will take a long step to get there, but the more steps we can take in getting there, the better a society we will be. It feels like it is our responsibility to support people who are vulnerable, especially when we have the privilege of knowing where we will be going each day and where we will be sleeping each night.

I ask that this government do a bit more to help vulnerable people across this wealthy state. I ask that we do a bit more to help people who are experiencing homelessness, particularly in the regions where other social support services are much harder to come by.