

CHILDREN IN CARE — HOME STRETCH PROGRAM

**421. Dr K. STRATTON to the Minister for Child Protection:**

I refer to the WA Labor government's election commitment to extend support for young people leaving care through to the age of 21 years. Can the minister update the house on the impacts of the government's Home Stretch program, including how many young people this life-changing program has supported to date; and can the minister advise the house of how this program supports young people moving towards independence to reach their full potential?

**Ms S.E. WINTON replied:**

I thank the member for Nedlands for the question. I acknowledge and put on the record not only her strong advocacy in the community sector space, but also her knowledge and the impact she is having on government policy.

Home Stretch is a really important initiative and flagship program for the WA Labor government, and I am very proud that this election commitment was one that we took to the people in 2021. Our government is investing some \$37.2 million to deliver this important program. The significant difference it is making to young people's lives is quite incredible and it has been a great privilege since becoming Minister for Child Protection to actually talk in person with the young people for whom this Home Stretch program is making a quite extraordinary difference.

Earlier in the week it was great to have the opportunity to speak to a young man whose life has been positively impacted by Home Stretch, and this morning it was my great pleasure to be at the Department of Communities in Fremantle as we held a morning tea to celebrate a huge milestone for the program—that 150 young people have now been supported as part of this program. As members know, this program supports young people when they leave care, usually at the age of 18, but they are now being supported in a very significant way until the age of 21. Assistance can include financial support; mentoring; helping find accommodation; enrolling in educational institutions; re-engaging with health services; improving financial skills; and connecting with voluntary work opportunities. The program can offer young people access to a transition coach, a staying-on subsidy, housing allowances and the Invest in Me fund. These will provide a financial safety net to support young people in achieving their goals. Importantly, Home Stretch will also ensure that the carers who support these young people are supported financially, to keep supporting those young people beyond the age of 18 and to help cover expenses such as food, accommodation and utilities.

I mentioned that on Monday I met with an extraordinary young man, Gerome, who is part of the Home Stretch program. He was courageous and honest in sharing with me his life's journey and experiences, and what Home Stretch has meant for him as he now transitions to independence. What was also quite extraordinary about Gerome was that, in telling his story, he wanted to make an impact on other young people and he wanted to give back and provide the same opportunities for other young people. I really commend him for his courage and motivation in wanting to help and support other young people like him. During the morning tea I also had the opportunity to hear from many other young people who have benefited from this program.

I would also like to acknowledge my predecessor in the child protection portfolio, Hon Simone McGurk, who has done an extraordinary job over six years in getting this program to where it is today, when we can celebrate 150 young people whose lives have been influenced significantly and in a positive way to be their best selves. I would also like to acknowledge the Home Stretch team in the Department of Communities and the various service providers, including Anglicare WA, the Yorganop Association Inc, the Salvation Army, Wanslea and Mission Australia. They all do an incredible job in supporting and making Home Stretch a success.

Today we also announced that six Aboriginal community-controlled organisations will now become part of the Home Stretch program, which will allow the program to be delivered in the Pilbara—member for Pilbara—and in the Kimberley. These organisations are: the MG Corporation in Kununurra and Wyndham; Jungarni Jutiya in Halls Creek; Broome Youth and Families Hub in Broome; Marra Worra Aboriginal Corporation in Fitzroy Crossing; the Bloodwood Tree Association in Port Hedland; and Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation in Karratha, Roebourne and Wickham.

Appointing these ACCOs is really important, and shows how committed this government is to supporting place-based solutions and services to deliver for young people in the regions who are leaving care. I extend my congratulations to these organisations on stepping up to be part of this program, and I look forward to updating the house in the future on how the Home Stretch program will continue to support young people leaving care. Our young people are our best asset in our communities, and Home Stretch is absolutely helping young people to reach their potential and make fantastic contributions in their lives.