

FIRST NATIONS HOMELESSNESS PROJECT

391. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to the First Nations Homelessness Project, a program that has saved hundreds of Aboriginal families from eviction and kept more than 1 500 children off the street.

- (1) Is it true that the minister told Jennifer Kaeshagen, the founder of the project, that there are no available funds from the state government to support this project?
- (2) Will the minister reconsider this and work with the project to find just \$50 000 a year from the government's \$5 billion surplus to allow it to keep offering this vital and proven service?

Ms S.F. MCGURK replied:

- (1)–(2) Madam Speaker, I am happy to take this question. I did meet with representatives from the First Nations Homelessness Project. This is a project that had been funded under the federal government, to my recollection with \$1 million a year for four years, to assist families who are at risk of eviction. Although it is important to note that it is not an Aboriginal-controlled organisation, it has a strong relationship with many Aboriginal families, and credit to it for its work on the ground, and particularly to Jennifer. I have met with her a number of times and I know that she does good work.

However, the state government currently, through the Minister for Housing's area of responsibility, has the Thrive program. That is \$11 million a year given to support families or tenants in public housing who are at risk of losing their tenancies by helping them to maintain their tenancies and overcome the issues that they are confronting—\$11 million a year. It is a \$58 million contract that has been given to a range of different organisations around the state to do that work. To my knowledge, the First Nations Homelessness Project has never applied for funding in any of those tender processes. It had an opportunity to apply through the Thrive tender process and elected not to do so.

When the federal government funds an organisation, and then when that money runs out, all of a sudden the opposition wakes up and says that the state government should be funding this organisation, because the federal government has decided to withdraw its funding. It is staggering. We cannot pick up the tab every time the federal government decides to withdraw funding from a pet project that it had decided to fund. All of a sudden, the federal government is saying to the state government, "This is a housing issue; you should fund this project." We spend \$11 million a year to support tenancies. I think that is a good contribution.

While I am on my feet, member, I did want to address the issue that was raised yesterday in a question in this place and that has since been reported in *The West Australian*—namely, the member's question about whether there are 100 pregnant women, as the member claimed, in the south west who are believed to be without a fixed address and perhaps facing homelessness. I asked the member in the answer to that question what her source of information was, and the member did not answer that in her supplementary. When I was reading the article in *The West Australian*, I was interested to see that it seems that one of the sources of the information in this article is a representative from the Australind Lions Club, which develops care packs for people struggling to find accommodation. All credit to it. I am sure it does good work. I respect that work. That is good work. But it is not a paid service provider that would understand the extent of homelessness and who is at risk of homelessness.

Interestingly, the other source of information is actually Gerry Georgatos from the First Nations Homelessness Project, also an organisation that does not receive funding from our government and is not a service provider that has access to any reliable data. I would be interested to know from where the member gets her information. If you want to be the Leader of the Opposition, and if you want to be credible in asking for information about sensitive issues, can I ask where you got that information from, and whether in fact it is from any paid service provider or from any reliable piece of data.

This government is investing in this area. Yesterday was census night. We encourage people to participate in the census, and I met with some staff employed by the census providers to go out and work with homeless people. We are funding new data collection in Bunbury and Geraldton, in the metropolitan area, and in a number of regional centres to make sure we have reliable information, not rumour and speculation on which to base some sort of hysterical claims.

The SPEAKER: Just before I give the supplementary, it is not open for the person asking the question to respond to matters in a supplementary; all they are able to do is ask the supplementary question. But I note that we will be having a debate on this issue later in private members' time, so you might get a response to the questions if directed then, minister. Leader of the Opposition, with a supplementary.