

## TRANSFOLK OF WA

### *Grievance*

**DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands)** [9.28 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Youth. I thank the minister for taking my grievance; I know that he shares a concern to ensure that diversity is a key consideration when developing, delivering and funding services for young people in Western Australia. The minister will also be aware of the significant contribution of TransFolk of WA to the lives of trans and gender diverse young people, their families and our broader community. Its vision is for all trans and gender diverse people to be valued and empowered members of communities. Its purpose is to inform, empower and advocate for trans and gender diverse people to survive and thrive. TransFolk of WA is a peer-led, volunteer organisation based in the seat of Nedlands. It currently operates without state or other government funding and relies on partnerships such as the one it has developed with Perth Inner City Youth Service, which is another great and inclusive youth organisation in my electorate. It also relies on expert volunteers and donations and, most recently, a Lotterywest grant. TransFolk of WA provides social and support groups for trans and gender diverse people as well as for parents and carers; online, safe and private Facebook groups for sharing information, stories and experiences; training, including trans 101 workshops, providing workplaces and community groups practical ways to be more inclusive of trans and gender diverse people; events, particularly during Pride; a binder program; advocacy for trans and gender diverse people; and contributions to legal and policy development.

Just recently it published a detailed impact report regarding its binder program. I want to outline some of the outcomes reported from this program in order to highlight the contribution of TransFolk of WA to the transgender and gender diverse community and to their sense of identity, belonging and wellbeing. A binder is a tight top worn to flatten the appearance of the chest, and wearing one can make some trans and gender diverse people feel much more comfortable with their body, having an impact on their mental health and belonging. In the last year, TransFolk of WA provided 127 binders to people in need—that is, people who would not have otherwise been able to afford or access one. The report showed that 94 per cent of those accessing the service were young people, aged 12 to 25 years, and 60 per cent had been unable to access a binder for two or more years. Upon receiving the binder, people have reported how they felt. One example was, “Absolute relief and validation. Wearing it for the first time was life changing, seeing myself reflected in the mirror.” Another recipient commented, “It was like I was finally myself. There have been a couple times when people thought I was an actual boy and it made me so happy.” The recipients reported four key impacts of the binder, with 96 per cent reporting a decreased dysphoria experience; 92 per cent reported a boost in their self-confidence; 92 per cent experienced gender euphoria; and 83 per cent felt more comfortable in their body.

The binder program relies purely on donations and volunteers, although for the first time this last year TransFolk of WA was able to employ someone to administer the program due to a Lotterywest grant. Indeed, my first meeting with TransFolk of WA was to present the board and volunteers with this Lotterywest grant. The purpose of the grant was to provide it the opportunity to build capacity, such as infrastructure, policy and procedures and governance systems to be ready to apply for and manage ongoing funding and grants. The Lotterywest grant was also to assist in building the capacity of volunteers, which is obviously essential in a volunteer-run organisation. This in turn allowed it to recruit more volunteers to provide its essential services and ensure the ongoing sustainability of the organisation. As a note, this is the first time in its history that TransFolk of WA has been able to employ someone; however, there is a need for ongoing funding as current demand outstrips need.

A major source of referral and connection for TransFolk of WA is the Gender Diversity Clinic at Perth Children’s Hospital, the only dedicated public health service for trans and gender diverse people. TransFolk of WA also has an important partnership with the Perth Inner City Youth Service. PICYS is well recognised and known in the community services sector as an ally and advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community and is a safe place for people to access necessary services. With a background in community services, I have known of the inclusive, proactive work of PICYS with highly vulnerable, hard to reach and hard to engage people. That TransFolk of WA has built professional and engaged working relationships with these two key stakeholders says a lot about its important work in this space and how this is valued and viewed. However, TransFolk of WA remains the only specific psycho-support service for trans and gender diverse people in WA. It works with people as young as 12 and into adulthood, meaning it also need to adapt its services for people at different developmental stages, adding a further layer of complexity to the work.

We know that trans and gender diverse people face discrimination in our schools, workplaces, community and, sadly for many, inside their own families. Such discrimination is damaging on a day-to-day basis, causing people pain, alienation, isolation and hurt in the here and now. Such discrimination, including unemployment and poverty, also impacts people’s access to medical, social and community services. On a systems level, it can mean organisations dedicated to serving this community are excluded from funding as well as from discussions on policy, health and law. Lived experience, backed up by research, tells us that trans and gender diverse people experience significant health and mental health disparities. According to a 2021 study, depression and anxiety are experienced by the

majority of trans and gender diverse people, with 54 per cent of the study's participants reporting previous self-harm, and 49 per cent having attempted suicide. They experience much higher rates of homelessness, and a significant majority report experiences of being treated unfairly due to their gender identity in the last 12 months. There is, therefore, substantive research and service evidence, as well as principles of social justice and inclusivity, to demonstrate the need for the unique service provided by TransFolk of WA.

State government funding for TransFolk of WA would provide a number of benefits: a message to the trans and gender diverse community that the WA government recognises their unique needs; security for TransFolk of WA and the people it serves that its services will be ongoing; and a firm basis from which to continue to expand its services to meet the ever-increasing demand. Today I am seeking reassurance from the Minister for Youth that the WA state Labor government will provide funding to TransFolk of WA.

**MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Youth)** [9.36 am]: I thank the member for Nedlands for raising this issue with me and for her ongoing advocacy for young people in general in her community, but in particular for young people who identify as members of LGBTQIA+ community. Young people are a particularly vulnerable cohort, so it is important that we listen to their needs and their community. The Telethon Kids Institute just this week released a new report outlining comprehensive guidelines for clinical and community services that support LGBTQIA+ young people. These guidelines confirm what many of us already know: that LGBTQIA+ young people aged between 12 and 25 years of age are at significantly higher risk of suicide than their peers who are cisgender and heterosexual.

Despite growing social acceptance of this community, young people are still at continuing risk of stigma, rejection and discrimination, leading to increased rates of mental health presentation. As Minister for Youth, I am acutely aware of the need and that this Labor government responds to that need. I am fortunate to have a Ministerial Youth Advisory Council that has raised this issue with me on a number of occasions. One of the council's recommendations to me was that the government fund an advocacy service for young people who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The member will be aware that I have already announced funding for the Youth Pride Network, which will advocate on these issues across the community. I was really pleased that last night I had members of the Youth Pride Network here in Parliament meeting members of the Labor caucus who identify as members of that community. That was a great event. They sat in the gallery for a short time. It was a way of showing the community that we recognise their needs. Today I also announced funding of \$275 000 for a youth grant round specifically targeting people who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community, with grants between \$2 000 and \$25 000 for organisations that want to run programs or services to elevate the voice of that community.

I am really pleased that the state government has responded to that community in a number of ways. The member raised with me the needs of transgender young people; in particular, the need for support for TransFolk of WA. TransFolk of WA is a really impressive organisation and I want to congratulate Hunter, in particular, whom I have met on a number of occasions, for the energy and commitment he has shown to getting TransFolk up and running. I am aware that it has received some Lotterywest grant funding, but if it is going to continue to develop its services, it really needs some ongoing support from the state government. I am pleased to advise the member that I have secured funding of \$300 000 for TransFolk of WA for the next three years to enable it to employ a youth project officer. As the member is aware, TransFolk of WA provides services to members of the trans community across all age groups. As the Minister for Youth, I am providing it with this funding so that it can employ a youth project officer to help young people who identify as part of the trans community. It is a very daunting process for young people who are trying to come to grips with these issues and want to know what to do and where to go for support. I hope a youth project officer, developing programs through TransFolk of WA, will be a great support to young people in this community.

Despite growing community acceptance, there are still people who wish to use the trans community as a political football. We saw quite disgraceful comments made during the federal election by members of the federal Liberal and National Parties, in particular. The Liberal Party deliberately preselected a candidate for the seat of Warringah who made some really offensive comments about the trans community. Politicians should never use a vulnerable group such as the trans community and seek to gain political mileage out of them. It was a really disgraceful example of that in the federal election. I am really pleased that that candidate in Warringah was unsuccessful. I hope that is a lesson to members opposite that the trans community, like everybody else in this state, should be treated with dignity and compassion rather than be seen as a vulnerable cohort who can be exploited.

I really appreciate the member for Nedlands' advocacy for young people in her community and, particularly, her interest in young people who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community, especially young trans folk. The member mentioned the Perth Inner City Youth Services—PICYS—which is located in her electorate. It is a fantastic youth organisation. As the member mentioned, PICYS is rightly seen as a strong ally of the trans community, and I commend it for the work it does. I thank the member for the grievance. I am very much looking forward to what TransFolk of WA can do with the state government's ongoing funding commitment.