

**ACCESS CULINARY COURSE — GRADUATION**

*Statement by Minister for Disability Services*

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Disability Services)** [12.08 pm]: I rise today to inform the house of my recent attendance at a very special event to recognise the 2021 graduates of an access culinary course delivered by Vision Australia and the Annalakshmi Cultural Centre restaurant. Annalakshmi has a social welfare not-for-profit approach and is largely staffed by volunteers and managed by Mr Arun Natarajan, the director of the centre. The Annalakshmi access culinary science program was established about three years ago by Ms Mallika Jegasothy—Dr Jega. Using her physiotherapy and rehabilitation background, Dr Jega had a dream to provide cooking skills to people with disability. In early 2020, Annalakshmi and Vision Australia, an organisation that provides services and advocacy for people who are blind or vision impaired, worked together to create a 13-week cooking course tailored to Vision Australia’s National Disability Insurance Scheme participants. Course participants are assisted by Annalakshmi instructors and Vision Australia occupational therapists to extend their culinary knowledge of Indian and Asian cuisines. The skills gained help participants prepare meals in their own kitchens and also to seek future employment. Like everyone else, people with disability have aspirations and the desire to contribute to their local communities and the Western Australian community more broadly.

*A Western Australia for everyone: State disability strategy 2020–2030* has many actions relating to the education, training, employment and social participation of people with disability. The state disability strategy outlines the state’s whole-of-community commitment to changing the lives of people living with disability, and is key to achieving more inclusive, caring and accessible communities that enable people to live well. The state disability strategy also aims to protect people who may be vulnerable, and to ensure everyone is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Fourteen people who are blind or have vision impairment graduated from this cooking course, and they are all fine examples of people taking on challenges, working hard, and gaining new skills. The Vision Australia course at Annalakshmi focuses on supporting people with disability to achieve their goals and to live their lives on their own terms. This is integral to building an inclusive and equitable society through health, wellbeing, social and economic participation. As Minister for Disability Services, it gave me great joy to see firsthand the graduation of Perth’s next master chefs, and I warmly congratulate Annalakshmi, Vision Australia and all involved in this positive example of inclusion and equity in our community.