

HOMELESSNESS — SERVICES

575. Mr J.N. CAREY to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to today's commitment by the state government to provide more funding for homeless support services in central Perth—in particular, services provided by the Tranby hub. Can the minister outline to the house what these expanded services will mean for rough sleeping in the city, and how this additional funding will build on this government's compassionate approach to addressing homelessness?

Ms S.F. MCGURK replied:

I thank the member for Perth for not only the question but also his interest and the work he has done over the last 12 months or so with the City of Perth and businesses affected by antisocial behaviour and homelessness in his electorate. He is not just talking to the media about it and trying to get headlines; he is actually doing the work to resolve the issue and to come up with solutions.

I am very pleased that today we were able to announce half a million dollars in state government funding to extend the operating hours of the Tranby Day Centre so that it will now be open from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm, seven days a week. At the moment it is open until only 1.00 pm or thereabouts during the week, until midday on Saturday and is not available on Sunday. There is a range of things we need to do if we want to reduce the number of homeless people in our state. One is to have a planned, coordinated, evidence-driven response. That is the first thing we have to do, and that is precisely the work we have been doing with the not-for-profit sector—looking at what the rest of the world is showing us is best practice in addressing homelessness. I think the centrepiece of the work of the homelessness strategy will be a housing-first approach, in which we get the right sort of accommodation for people and give them the support they need, for as long as they need, so that they are stable in that accommodation.

We also need to do other things. We need to make sure there are touchpoints for people when they are experiencing either rough sleeping or homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. These are provided by Tranby Day Centre, run by UnitingCare West, and centres run by Ruah Community Services, the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Salvation Army in Northbridge. We need to be available for people so that when they are ready to receive help, they know exactly where they can go to receive assistance. Frankly, we also need to provide a human face, a hot drink and some comfort in what are obviously very challenging circumstances. That was part of the announcement we made today, and I am very pleased to have taken advice from the member for Perth, the City of Perth and other stakeholders we have been working with to come up with some practical solutions.

Another part of today's announcement was about other important touchpoints for people experiencing homelessness in our state. There is another half a million dollars—\$550 000, in fact—to help keep Foyer Oxford open; members will be aware of that very successful model for making sure that young people do not become entrenched in life on the streets and through which we can give them support very early on to get them used to renting and the obligations of going to work or study. Foyer Oxford has been very successful in doing that. It had been funded by BHP for five years, but its contribution had come to an end, so I am very pleased that the Department of Communities has been able to continue that funding.

Far from the generalisations about people who are homeless—that they are all drug and alcohol-affected zombies who we should be afraid of—the stories behind the approximately 9 000 people who are homeless every year are as varied as they are numerous. That was brought home very, very clearly to us at the launch of *When there's no place to call home*. I urge members of the public and members of the opposition to have a look at some of the personal stories in this book of people who are experiencing homelessness, to understand how they got to be in the situations that they are in. Two of the people who feature in the book were, in fact, assisted by Foyer Oxford and are now living stable lives, working and contributing. One of those women, Holly Rose, told an incredibly compelling and articulate story about her circumstances when she was 20 years old and had a younger sister with a disability. Her mother had a mental illness. Her mother went on holidays to America and that was the last she saw of her. As a result, she was left to manage a house and her younger sister, who had a disability, and to try to organise finances and the like. Although her sister ended up being looked after by her father and her broader family, Holly Rose was not in that position and she ended up homeless. It was actually Foyer Oxford that pulled her out of that situation. That is why we need these sorts of touch points to support people to get them back on their feet and to be contributing members of our community.

There are many other stories like that. Not everyone affected by drugs and alcohol or methamphetamine is homeless and not all our homeless people are affected by drugs and alcohol and are threats to us on our streets. I think that most Western Australians understand that. They feel some compassion. They want us to do better for the most vulnerable in our community, and that is exactly what we as a government are doing.

I note that the member for Carine is nodding his head, but I have not heard one constructive contribution or suggestion from him since he became opposition leader, looking at homelessness.

Several members interjected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: He is the shadow spokesperson on homelessness. Sorry; I just elevated him above his station! Several members interjected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: He did try, but he did not get many votes; that is right.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not know whether he or the opposition made a contribution to the homelessness strategy about what they think could be a useful solution or useful proposals to improve on a challenging piece of policy work and social situation that most jurisdictions are grappling with.

Finally, the other announcement today was that just under half a million dollars will go to the Home Stretch campaign. We know that young people leaving the child protection system are at greater risk of being homeless and having many life challenges. We need to do better for those people. We are working with Anglicare on a pilot that will be very closely researched to track how we can go for those young people. It is a \$1.5 million effort today. It is not the end of our efforts. In fact, we want to continue doing this work so that we can support homeless and vulnerable people in our state.