

HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

898. Ms J.M. FREEMAN to the Minister for Community Services:

I am glad I am awake!

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to working with the community services sector to address homelessness and support at-risk Western Australians.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on how the 10-year homelessness strategy will guide a whole-of-government effort in supporting those experiencing homelessness?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house on whether such a long-term strategy has been developed in Western Australia before now?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for her question. I know that this is an issue that affects her electorate and about which she has been an active advocate for an effective response by government.

- (1)–(2) Homelessness has also affected my community very acutely. We see street-present people every day in my neighbourhood and around my electorate office but, of course, that is just one manifestation of homelessness. People throughout the state are couch surfing and sleeping in cars. People in regional and remote areas are affected by homelessness as well. We need to make sure that we are providing services to and in response to them.

Essential to any approach to homelessness is an understanding that there but for the grace of God. At any time in our lives we, or more likely people we know in our community or family members, could be affected by homelessness because of circumstances beyond their control. Homelessness is affected by complex issues such as family breakdowns, mental illness, domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse and employment issues. We need to make sure an understanding of the causes of homelessness and the dignity of the individuals affected is at the centre of our response. We must put the needs of those people first in our approach this issue. Many good services throughout the metropolitan area and regional centres are dealing with the immediate needs of homelessness and homeless people. They are doing a fantastic job.

However, we need a long-term strategy to really tackle this issue and lower the number of people who are homeless throughout the state on any one night, which is estimated at 9 000. We have embarked on a 10-year homelessness strategy in partnership with the community services sector. We have just finished a range of consultations around the state with community members, service providers and people who have experienced homelessness. To better understand the experiences of community members, homeless people and the services that are tackling this issue, we had three consultations in the metro area and consultations in eight regional centres: Broome, Kununurra, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton, Karratha, Port Hedland, Bunbury and Albany. About 300 people attended the sessions around the state.

We are not providing a report for the sake of it. This is not a plan to have a plan. This is a strategic approach. Other jurisdictions have made inroads into dealing with homelessness. Members may have heard me speak about this before, but I am very supportive of a housing-first approach then linking services with those people depending on what they need and keeping those services with them for as long as they need that support. With the 50 Lives 50 Homes project we saw that with a collaborative approach—when government works with the community sector in all its forms and the community itself—that uses an evidence-based approach to track the effectiveness of our interventions over time, we can start to have a better idea about what is working and apply those at a larger scale. If our approaches are not working, we can make the decision to pull back and apply resources where they need to be applied. That is the work that we are doing with the strategy, in concert with the community services sector. I am not aware that any government has done that before. Taking a strategic approach certainly was not part of the previous government's approach to this very stubborn issue in our community. At the heart of our response is compassion, an understanding of homeless people and a commitment to understand their needs and to work with them for as long as it takes so that they can lead happy, healthy and stable lives.