

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN CARE

754. Ms J.M. FREEMAN to the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's priority of improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal Western Australians. Can the minister outline to the house how this government is working in partnership with Aboriginal families and communities to address the issue of Aboriginal children coming into care?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for that very important question. I hope members would be aware that it is Child Protection Week this week, and it is important. Unfortunately, child protection gets attention by the community when something goes wrong, when there is a bad-news story, but I know that most of the time throughout the rest of the year, our department, our partners in caring for children in care and their families, are doing a lot of very good work out there supporting some of the most vulnerable in our community. The theme for National Child Protection Week is Walking Together. That is very fitting. We have an enormous challenge when 55 per cent of children in care are Aboriginal. We need to do a lot better first of all in preventing children coming into care. This government has invested record amounts in early intervention for vulnerable families. Specifically, \$97 million has been allocated in a number of different programs, but essentially working with families who are under stress and continue to partner with them to try to prevent those children from coming into care and to get those families safe and healthy. Since that money has been allocated, we have been working with 2 383 families and over 5 200 children. That is a large number throughout our state. A number of those contracts have been given to Aboriginal-controlled organisations. For the first time that early intervention work has the widest reach that it has ever had in our state.

Importantly, we announced this week that we would partner with an organisation called the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care—SNAICC. It is the peak advocacy body for Aboriginal children in care. We need to build up the capacity of Aboriginal-controlled organisations in our state to work with the department and with families to better protect children and to work at some of the issues that are causing children to be at risk. We will work with SNAICC to make sure that throughout our state, we have good, robust systems in place for Aboriginal-controlled community organisations to step up and do more of this work. We have given them a lot of that early intervention work, and they are doing some child protection work, but we need to do that a lot more. It was a significant announcement that we will work with SNAICC to do that work. Of course, all this is also underpinned by our priorities in government and our whole-of-government targets to improve Aboriginal wellbeing. It is important that we hold ourselves to account by a whole-of-government target to drive change across agencies. I am very proud of those targets across government. In addition, we are doing a lot of work to try to prevent the sort of stresses that have seen children come into care—for instance, family and domestic violence, mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, housing stress and the like. They are the sort of issues that we are also tackling, in partnership with the community.

There is always a lot of work to do in child protection. It is a very challenging area, as I said, with some of the state's most vulnerable families. I am very proud of the work the Department of Communities is doing. We are doing that completely in lock step with community organisations, particularly Aboriginal-controlled organisations, to get better outcomes.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Sport and Recreation, I call you to order for the second time for your mobile phone, and then you threw it on the ground. If it happens again, I will get you to table it for the rest of the day.