

Chairman; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr John Day; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Trevor Sprigg

Division 69: Communities - Service 1, Community and Family Support, \$5 138 000; Service 2, Child Care Services, \$6 169 000; Service 3, Strategic Policy and Coordination, \$14 950 000 -

Mr G. Woodhams, Chairman.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for the Environment representing the Minister for Communities.

Mr R.W. Salvage, Acting Director General, Department of Communities.

Dr R.E. Shean, Acting Director General, Department for Child Protection.

Ms P. Bagdonavicius, Executive Director, Policy and Planning.

Ms M. Dawkins, Acting Executive Director, Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering.

Ms L. McGrath, Acting Executive Director, Office for Women's Policy.

Mr M. Glasson, Executive Director, Family and Domestic Violence Unit, Department for Child Protection.

Mr S. Dawson, Office of the Minister for the Environment.

Ms F.J. Lander, Acting Executive Director, Office for Children and Youth.

Mr M.F. Intini, Executive director, Corporate and Business Services

[8.50 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Roe is to ask the first question.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer to the seventh dot point under significant issues and trends at page 1194. I am happy that the new Commissioner for Public Sector Standards is here. Is the minister aware that his department's webpage for women's policy has multiple links to the Australian Council of Trade Unions' industrial relations propaganda, including an encouragement for people to sign a pledge, which states -

I will not forget the Howard Government's attack on fairness and equality when I vote at the next election.

Concerning the comments of the previous Commissioner for Public Sector Standards in which she raised the issue of the politicisation of the public sector, I ask firstly whether the minister is aware of that, and if he is, what does he believe should be done about it, particularly if he is to maintain a department that is not to be used as a political tool?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Women in Economic and Social Research is a research unit at Curtin University. In collaboration with researchers in other jurisdictions it is undertaking a study that will monitor the impact of WorkChoices on employed women. A number of researchers are involved, including Marion Baird, Sarah Charlesworth, Barbara Pocock and Gillian Whitehouse. The monitoring of the impact of WorkChoices on women is a key priority of the Office of Women's Interests. The focus is supportive of a project titled "Women's pay and conditions in an era of changing workplace regulations". Clearly, the changes that have been introduced with the WorkChoices regime by the federal government are deemed by a number of stakeholders and interest groups to have impacts. It is important that impacts on interest groups or target groups are measured and looked at closely. As such, this is a priority for the Office of Women's Interests.

There are two stages to the research project. The first is the development of a set of indicators of women's pay and conditions of employment. It is appropriate that that element is looked at. We know, statistically, that women continue to be paid less than men. Therefore, when there is regime change concerning industrial relations at any level the impact, particularly on those most vulnerable, is an important element to be looked at. I accept and understand and support such an inquiry. That is why the first stage of the project is mentioned. The second stage is a case study of 100 women across Australia to examine the impact of WorkChoices on women's employment conditions. Again, to ascertain the impact of the changes we need to look at case studies. That is the reason the case study involves 100 women across the country. The research project is part of the work.

There will be policy initiatives introduced by governments of all persuasions both at a federal and state level. When a department or organisation has the responsibility to protect the interests of women, I see no reason it would not be core business if there is a key change to employment conditions. Therefore, I certainly understand why the impact of WorkChoices has been a focus of the department's work.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I understand the need for inquiry and research. I also understand the need to explore the disadvantages of women's pay and conditions. I do not deny that it is necessary. However, that is different from this blatant direction of voting patterns, which states -

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I will not forget the Howard Government's attack on fairness and equality when I vote at the next election.

That is pretty blatant political direction. I accept all the minister says about inquiry and research. I accept that disadvantages still exist in the community for women's pay and conditions. I cannot accept the blatant political direction I have just quoted. The minister must concede that it steps over the line in political direction when it appears on a department's website.

[9.00 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We should never ignore the fact that men and women will make their own choices. They will take in information, process that information and then make an informed choice. We should not prejudge the intelligence of anybody, and certainly not women. Women make choices, and they will continue to do so. The websites of the various organisations, groups or departments are just that - sounding boards. Women will make their choices without the huge amounts of money being spent, for example, by the federal government to defend its indefensible WorkChoices legislation and regime. Later this year, Australian men and women will have the opportunity to make an informed choice on whether those changes and that regime are fair.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I refer to the first dot point on page 1194 of the *Budget Statements*. As the minister knows, volunteering is very close to my heart. As the government recognises that there is an ageing of the overall Western Australian population, what funds have been specifically allocated towards dealing with this issue, and where are they being spent?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member, and I acknowledge his interest in volunteering, particularly in ensuring that those in the seniors age bracket maintain their independence, health and wellbeing, and mental health, and continue to make a tremendous contribution to our community, as they have over many years. The government acknowledges the importance of supporting and encouraging volunteering in this sector, but it also acknowledges the importance of maintaining the health and wellbeing of that sector of the population, for a variety of reasons, including that mentally and physically healthy people are good for the community. I can identify 12 funded initiatives across 15 different government agencies as examples of the government's Active Ageing initiative, which has been focused on delivering funded opportunities and initiatives right across the state, in rural and regional areas as well as the metropolitan area. The Office of Seniors' Interests and Volunteering has developed benchmark indicators, and research has been done on the key transitional stages of ageing in later life. That research had been funded with \$52 000. We have placed community linkage officers in regional areas to run programs supporting intergenerational awareness and communication, at a cost of \$350 000. There are two officers in rural and regional Western Australia - one in Albany and one in Geraldton. The role of those officers has been to work with seniors and younger people on intergenerational initiatives. These projects vary. For example, I have seen projects in which grandfathers go fishing with their grandchildren and other children in the care of the chief executive officer of the Department for Child Protection. We have a depression prevention and awareness program for older people funded to the tune of \$455 000. As we are well aware, depression impacts on many people of all ages, but older people are particularly susceptible. We know that, if properly managed, depression can be treated and people can come out of the depression cycle.

Elder abuse is a particularly important issue. An elder abuse prevention alliance was formed to inform government policy and promote community awareness of elder abuse. When I was minister, I was very pleased to host a breakfast with representatives of financial institutions. A number of high-level bank representatives attended. The aim of the function was for them to understand that financial abuse of older people, predominantly by members of their own families, is a growing phenomenon. They have a responsibility in the area of awareness and in the training of staff to identify and recognise this growing problem. The message was very well received, with the attendance of key banking executives and follow-up sessions with the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering. The office also has projects and partnerships with the World Health Organization, for example, and the City of Melville. Dr Alexander Kalache, who is a WHO expert on elder abuse, visited the state and I met with him last year. Western Australia is, I believe, at the leading edge in dealing with elder abuse.

All these issues are related to active ageing and supporting older people as they age. We know that by 2041, nearly one in three Western Australians will be considered seniors. The government, through the work of the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering, continues to lead in the area of addressing the needs of our ageing population into the future.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I refer the minister to page 1201. In the light of the fact that service 3, "Strategic policy and coordination", has just over 50 per cent of the budgeted amount, most of my questions will relate to this page. The first dot point on that page reads -

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Launched a 'Parenting Information Pack' which brought together the best resources available under an umbrella brand targeting parents of babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers.

I am sure that I am not the only member of Parliament who sees 13 and 14-year-olds with children, people who can barely look after themselves, let alone a child. Is the minister able to provide any information on the success of the program referred to in the dot point? Was this just a general distribution, or was it targeted? I would like some general information about the parenting information pack.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is an important and exciting initiative. It is a resource kit that has had input from important service providers, including Ngala, SIDS and Kids, Playgroup WA, HBF, Dental Health WA, the Department of Child Protection and the Office for Children and Youth, through the work of Fiona Lander. The pack will be launched in June. It has the endorsement of Dr Fiona Wood, Royal Perth Hospital and Associate Professor Carmel Maloney of Edith Cowan University. It is an excellent resource that will be distributed widely. It has been sponsored by a variety of sources. I will ask the acting director of the Office for Children and Youth to give some detail of the scope of the pack.

[9.10 pm]

Ms F.J. Lander: The reason we did that is because anecdotally people are saying that information is out in the community but they cannot tell whether it is credible. Having asked Fiona Wood and Carmel Maloney to look through a whole range of materials available from non-government services and select the very best, we have put them together in a one-stop kit. The distribution strategy involves a sponsorship deal with Friendlies Chemists. There is also a Community Newspaper Group deal. A coupon in a community newspaper will allow people to obtain a pack from a Friendlies Chemist by either registering online, a telephone call or dropping in the coupon. It is a general promotion through the Community Newspaper Group. It is not targeted specifically at teenage mums; it is targeted at new parents. This pack is about babies and there will be follow-up packs on different age groups.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I refer to the third dot point under major initiatives at page 1199 of the *Budget Statements* which relates to undertaking annual regulatory visits to all childcare centres. Clearly, childcare centres are very important places. I know from personal experience that parents take a lot of interest when their children are in these centres. It is an exceedingly major initiative to visit all childcare centres. How will that be undertaken and what is the plan for the year?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I agree with the member's comments on the importance and the quality of child care. The government is committed to ensuring that every opportunity is given to children to achieve their potential. That means that when they are in the care of a childcare centre, crèche or any structured care facility or model that it is quality care. One of the government's responsibilities is to ensure that the quality of care is monitored. In 2005, the government bolstered the ability of the child care licensing and standards unit by an additional \$3.6 million. An investigation and prosecution team was established within the child care licensing and standards unit to assess evidence relating to serious non-compliance of regulations. That was an important move in that period. That funding also strengthened the management capability of the unit. It provided enhanced information in reporting capacity and increased permanent funding for licensing staff in the unit.

One of the problems that have been brought to my attention by the members for Avon, Merredin and Joondalup is the whole issue of making sure that quality childcare models are resilient models. Of course, for communities, particularly in rural and remote areas, a range of other impacts make the provision of quality child care even more challenging; for example, the availability of well-trained staff and appropriate facilities. I am pleased that through the department great inroads have been made and work has been done on what needs to happen with flexibility so that particularly rural and remote communities can continue to deliver quality child care. The specific needs of their region or town must be taken into account.

The government has made a commitment to visits. It is important that the government is confident that quality care is provided; therefore, it has a responsibility to check the centres. Last year a commitment of \$5.2 million over four years was made to the child care licensing and standards unit for it to ensure that every childcare service is visited on an annual basis and that it has flexibility to target those areas in which more coverage is needed. We want to make sure that our children's services officers are working effectively with the childcare centres, and that those that need additional support, for example in rural and remote areas in particular, get that support. This measure, the extra dollars and the focus on the compliance, if we like, or the capacity of the department to check on a more regular basis is important. We need to be aware that childcare centres by their very nature are already strongly regulated and there is a regime of regulation that is adhered to. By and large, the quality of child care in the state of Western Australia is of a high quality. Certainly, the additional measure of increasing the number of times checks and spot checks that occur is an important regulatory mechanism to ensure that the quality of care continues.

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The CHAIRMAN: As important as this subject is, I would prefer the chapter rather than the whole book in the minister's next answer.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer the minister to page 1200 and the first line in the table of expenditure, "Seniors Cards managed". Will the minister take me through the 2006-07 estimate of \$249 987 and the 2007-08 target of \$269 987? What is the method of calculation? I really want to know how many Seniors' Cards are in Western Australia.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member. I will keep my answer as short as I possibly can.

The CHAIRMAN: I thought the minister might.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We need to understand that, as of last year, the first wave of baby boomers turned 60 and, of course, that trend will continue. I think it is predicted that around 20 000 additional seniors will access the Seniors' Card. The Seniors' Card in Western Australia was established more than 20 years ago and is one of the most, if not the most, generous of all such cards in Australia. The reason for the increase is the increased number of baby boomers turning 60. Of course, I learnt something very quickly as minister for seniors: never get between a senior and a concession!

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I refer to the second dot point from the bottom on page 1193, which refers to the rate of suicide among young people. It says that it is concerning, which indeed it is. Is the trend increasing or decreasing in this state; are there concerns in particular cohorts of young people; and what action is being taken to better deal with this difficult problem?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for his question. It is a very important issue. The Office for Children and Youth, for example, has been a partner in a number of initiatives. The Office for Children and Youth is a policy unit, but it recognises that it must work in partnership with various other agencies. The health department also has specific carriage of this particular issue. However, the response to this issue comes from across government and across the community. There are a number of initiatives; for example, the involvement of the Office for Children and Youth has resulted in the publication of some youth suicide-related information kits, including a specific kit for Indigenous young people, which was developed in consultation with young Indigenous people. I do not know whether it is appropriate to table it, but that is one example that I can provide the member with.

[9.20 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: The minister can table it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to table three publications of the Office for Children and Youth that have been prepared in consultation with other stakeholders. The first is "Feeling Winyarn?", which is the Indigenous-focused publication. The second is the "Understanding Youth Suicide" information kit, which was developed in association with the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention. The third is an information and support pack for parents and other people who are concerned about somebody who is distressed or potentially suicidal.

In terms of numbers, I think the member was specifically asking for trends. The information I have shows a trend from 1986 to 2004 and it lists some figures. I am happy to table this information for the member, otherwise I would have to go through it in detail because it is broken up into age groups.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I am interested in whether things are getting better or worse, and how effective the programs are that have been put in place.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask the director to respond.

Ms F.J. Lander: There is improvement in certain age groups, but men and in particular regional men continue to have the highest rates of suicide. There are hot spots across Western Australia, and we work with the Office of Mental Health and the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention to pull together resources for those areas. There are suicide prevention workers on the ground working in those regional areas. There are resources that educate the community about the things people can do and how they can identify suicide. In terms of effectiveness, community education is the key to identifying the risk factors, who is at risk, who is experiencing depression or is at risk of suicide, and how we can respond to that. In the back of the folder that was tabled are some useful contacts. Unless we get those useful contacts and information about services out to the community, nobody will know what to do. That folder is an example of a highly effective initiative in the community.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Who is the folder intended for?

Ms F.J. Lander: The folder is intended for parents and people caring for someone who is distressed or suicidal. The folder is targeted towards people who think that a young person they have contact with may be at risk.

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Mr J.H.D. DAY: Has there been any evaluation of the effectiveness of these particular initiatives and other programs?

Ms F.J. Lander: Yes, there has. The folder was piloted by the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention in partnership with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research Margaret River. It has been highly commended for its content, and that is why we went into a production run. We funded the development of the pack, so that it could be widely distributed in the community. "Feeling Winyarn?" also has been evaluated. We have had a huge response from the community. We do an initial distribution of all our publications, and then they are sent out on demand. We distribute up to 10 000 "Understanding Youth Suicide" publications every year on an individual-request basis.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: It is good to hear that those publications are being put to good effect. What actions are being taken on the ground to provide counsellors and other professional staff to try to reduce the rate of suicide, particularly in some of the remote communities and rural areas to which the minister has referred?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Office for Children and Youth is a policy office, so it is not resourced. It is certainly not its core business to provide counsellors or other professionals. The publications that the Office for Children and Youth provides, or works in partnership to produce, and also the ongoing work that it does with the networks, particularly among young people, help to highlight the importance of those sorts of services. However, the office does not provide those services.

Mr P.B. WATSON: To get back to the question of suicides in regional areas, is there a target area? Do the statistics show which age group is most vulnerable?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As Ms Lander has mentioned, the profile for youth suicides in Western Australia tends to be young males between the ages of 16 and 25. In terms of location - I understand this is true of suicide statistics for the whole of the nation - there is still an over-representation in rural and regional Australia. That is also indicated in the statistics in Western Australia.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I refer to page 1202, the first dot point under "Major Initiatives For 2007-08", updating the whole-of-government active ageing strategy. This interests me, because I am ageing! That strategy has now been in operation for three years. How successful has that strategy been, and what are the plans for the future?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I could be rude and refer the member to my answer to the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale earlier, in which I highlighted a number of examples of projects focused on active ageing. I can tell the member that a consultative process involving state and local government agencies and non-government organisations will be developed in the coming period, 2008-09 to 2011-12. That will be a review of what has been achieved through the active ageing strategy. We expect that new programs will be developed over that period and will need to be funded. It is important to note what projects are working well. I have highlighted those projects as well. The active ageing strategy is focused on making sure that older Western Australians remain connected with their communities, both mentally and physically. As our population ages, we should expect more innovation. Some excellent programs are in place. However, we should not think that that is where it should stop.

Mr P.B. WATSON: The fact is that people's lifestyles are changing. People are trying to keep themselves fitter. We need to adapt our programs to fit in with that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is right. Partnerships have been established with local government and with other community organisations throughout the state, and they are feeding ideas and concepts into the Office of Seniors and Volunteering. One very good example is the intergenerational project in the member's electorate, where an officer has been working with seniors in Albany to develop programs and projects with local community organisations. That project has been excellent. The outcomes have certainly been very positive. The short answer is that we welcome innovation into the future for this growing sector.

The CHAIRMAN: I would hate to hear a long answer!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: My question relates to the very last dot point under major initiatives for 2007-08 for seniors and volunteering, which states -

Contribute to the development and funding of a Volunteer Resource Centre in the Pilbara.

I wonder whether the minister can possibly explain the source of funding for this project.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member may be aware, the government has funded a number of volunteer resource centres throughout the state. Many of these are in rural and regional Western Australia. I know that

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one is funded in Esperance, and I have had a great relationship with the people in Esperance who have worked in the volunteer resource centre. These volunteer resource centres are also in other parts of the state, including Peel, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Busselton. There are a number of them. The government has committed, and continues to commit, recurrent funding to these resource centres, because they are wonderful conduits for community organisations to access volunteers. What I have noticed in the past is that the volunteer resource centre becomes a pivotal place to which community organisations that are seeking volunteers go to find people who are willing to be active volunteers. Secondly, volunteer resource centres also provide excellent training opportunities. They access funding to hold training seminars and provide training opportunities for people and organisations that need to train volunteers. It is very important that we keep training volunteers. The Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering is supporting the Pilbara Development Commission in developing a volunteer resource centre model that is appropriate to the needs of a mining community. There are huge, different pressures when it is a mining community. Therefore, the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering is working closely with the Pilbara Development Commission. A volunteer resource centre was previously funded in Port Hedland, but that closed for a variety of reasons. However, the funding of \$10 000 in this budget to undertake the scoping and development of a service model relevant to the needs of the Pilbara community is underway. We are hoping that we will be able to establish a volunteer resource centre in the Pilbara once that scoping work has been done.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: In the next 12 months? What is the time line?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask the acting executive director of OSIV to answer that question.

Ms M. Dawkins: The scoping is pretty well underway, and we are confident that we will be able to establish and fund a centre in the 2007-08 financial year.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is excellent.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I refer to the sixth bullet point on page 1201 regarding Cadets WA. This is something in which I have a particular interest, courtesy of my involvement with the 501st Regional Cadet Unit - probably well before Cadets WA was around. However, even back then we had trouble with our numbers. I am curious about the success of this program. Are we seeing more involvement and more cadet units, if one likes? Basically, what are the numbers doing?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. Of course, Cadets WA is now entering its eleventh year of operation. It has a budget allocation of \$2.5 million. In 2006-07, the expenditure to date includes second semester funding of over \$800 000 and first semester funding in this year, 2007, of \$766 000. There is also provision for St John Ambulance cadets. It is important to note that when members think of Cadets WA, they sometimes think of the three defence services, but we have nine such cadet programs. They include the bushrangers, the police rangers and the lifesavers, including St John Ambulance cadets. There are very successful emergency service cadets. There are currently nearly 200 cadet units in Western Australia. Many of those are in rural Western Australia. Over 6 300 young people are currently involved in those nine cadet programs. Importantly, in 2007 - in just the first few months of this year - 14 new cadet units have been established and six of those have been in country WA. One of the important ones that I would like to highlight is the Bushrangers Cadet Unit at Halls Creek. The person who established that unit is a former Young Person of the Year, Dave Faulkner, a deputy principal. He is a great example of somebody working in that community and establishing a cadet unit there. We have seen an increase in the number of young people involved and an increase in the number of units in the state, and the trend is looking really good. The money that is spent on Cadets WA is very well spent.

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: I refer to the major initiatives for children and youth at the top of page 1203. They are admirable. I find it difficult to find any appropriation for them. I assume the appropriation is under service to childcare services. Is that correct?

Ms F.J. Lander: The appropriations are on a different page. It is a composite appropriation. It is composite across the new Department for Communities. The member needs to look at the appropriation in the context of the new department and all the different areas within that department.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would like to answer that question appropriately. We could take that question on notice and provide the member with the detail.

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: My objective is to find out what is being spent on these initiatives and to get a measurement of their success.

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Office for Children and Youth budget for 2007-08 is \$6 541 000. As Ms Lander mentioned, the breakdown of that figure is across the new department. How much is to be spent on the Office for Children and Youth? It is \$6 541 000 for 2007-08.

The CHAIRMAN: Will the minister provide the breakdown of those points under children and youth?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The figure I have given is the breakdown.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer to the first dot point on page 1200 of the *Budget Statements* under "Seniors and Volunteering", which reads -

Completed major research into the benefits and costs associated with the ageing of the Western Australian population.

So that I do not incur the wrath of the Chairman or the minister, perhaps the minister could refer me to that research and I will look it up myself.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We actually have a copy of that research here and we are happy to provide the member with a personal copy. Would he like me to sign it?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: If you please!

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure the member can get it from the minister later.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I refer to the second and third dot points from the bottom of page 1197 that refer to early-years activities and the development of a new early-years strategy. Will the minister tell us how much of the total allocation is intended to be spent in the next financial year on early-years activities, how much has been spent in the current year, and in what circumstances early-years activities are funded by the department?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask the relevant director to answer that question for the member.

Ms P. Bagdonavicius: In terms of the funding available for the early-years strategy, in the current financial year there is \$435 000 available for grant funding. Then in the next year, 2007-08, it is \$272 000 per annum. There had been some carryovers in this current financial year, which is why it was a higher figure. There is also \$200 000 per annum that has historically been made available to district officers of the Department for Community Development for various activities throughout those offices in promoting early-years activities. That funding will be transferring to the Department for Communities. Therefore, how the funding is used in the future will be revisited and considered through the work of the Department for Communities as it looks at what the early-years strategy is currently doing and what it needs to do into the future.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: That does not sound like a large amount of money for the whole state. I assume there is funding provided through other departments as well to some extent. Will the minister give us more information about the sorts of programs that are funded with the funding referred to, and also when the early-years strategy that is referred to in the budget will be finalised and the changes that might be put into effect as a result of it?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Ms Bagdonavicius may be able to respond.

Ms P. Bagdonavicius: It is clearly part of the work of the new Department for Communities to look at the early-years strategy. There is other work, as the members said, happening in other government departments. The funding I have highlighted is specific funding available to us through this specific area of grant funding. The grants that we have been providing through community grants have been up to \$35 000 and have been one-off grants. Some of the funding has also been augmented by Lotterywest. Lotterywest has on some occasions provided funding to organisations, instead of them having early-years activities grant funding, or they have been provided with additional funding over and above that. It has really been around funding to help facilitate local activities; it has not been about major activities in terms of major initiatives that require a lot of ongoing funding. It has been about the sorts of activities that can be done in a local community and having a particular focus, it has varied across the communities where it has occurred.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I refer to "Major Achievements For 2006-07" on page 1202 of the *Budget Statements*. The first dot point under the heading "Family and Domestic Violence" states -

Funded the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services to pilot a peer education program.

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I was hoping to get a bit more information on that peer education program. I assume it has a focus on younger Western Australians.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member, who has highlighted a pilot program in which the Cecil Andrews Senior High School in Armadale and the Coodanup Community College in Mandurah have been participating. The family and domestic violence unit has contributed some significant funding and in-kind support to these pilot projects. From my understanding of the program in my electorate, which I know best, it has been very successful. It has also been very effective in working with young people on the issue of family and domestic violence and its impact on families. I will ask the director of that unit to give the member more detail of what happens in that program.

Mr M. Glasson: The program is a partnership between the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services, the Department of Education and Training and the family and domestic violence unit. The intention of the program is to establish peer educators and peer supports within schools to provide information to young people who are experiencing family and domestic violence. The purpose of the program is to provide peer support rather than intervention. The young people are instructed on the local services that are available. If they become aware that a young person is living with violence, they are then in an informed position to refer them to someone who can provide support. A camp was held at the Keith Maine Centre in Whiteman Park earlier this month at which 23 young people from the two schools attended. They undertook three days of training to prepare them for the role. It is interesting that the camp was oversubscribed. We could not take more than 23 young people with us. Other activities were organised in the schools for the overflow. The outcome of the project will be completed in about September and we hope to expand it to other schools.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: This is my last question this evening. I refer to the completed 12 000 free/reduced volunteer police checks mentioned on page 1200. How many of those 12 000 police checks in the volunteer program are free; how many are reduced; and what are the criteria for each of them? What allows volunteers to have a free police check and what requires them to have a reduced-cost volunteer police check? What are the numbers?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: An estimated 1 300 police checks were completed in 2006-07. Some 1 300 were free checks for volunteers who also needed a working-with-children check. It is important to note that the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act, which was enacted in 2006, requires any volunteer who works with a child to have the appropriate working-with-children check. Over time, those targeted groups have been required to come on stream and apply for a working-with-children check. The highest priority volunteers and paid employees who are working with children went through those checks first. I will ask the Acting Executive Director for the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering to provide the member with the detail on the costings.

Ms M. Dawkins: The reduced-fee check that we provide through the Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering is \$9.50 as opposed to \$42 if it were obtained at a police station. The member's question was about the number of free checks we have done. The 1 300 free checks have been for volunteers who are also required to have a working-with-children check under the legislation. Rather than requiring those volunteers or the organisations that they work for pay twice, they are put through the national police program at no cost. The member would be aware that the working-with-children checks are constrained and prescribed. They look at offences only as they relate to working with children. They do not look at fraud, a person's capacity to drive vehicles or the use of medications or drugs. Hence, we have discovered that many volunteers will work with children and sit on management committees handling funds or they will drive buses. In those circumstances, they also need to undergo a broader check. This initiative allows those volunteers to pay only once.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I refer to the last dot point under "Major Achievements For 2006-07" on page 1200 of the *Budget Statements*, which states that the government -

Introduced and funded the effective 'Vista of Vs' volunteer recognition activity in communities across the state.

What funding was allocated to that initiative in the 2006-07 financial year?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The total amount was \$5 000. The office provided funding of \$250 to 20 organisations around the state to put on community displays to acknowledge local volunteers. I think the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale attended a couple of those events.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I did. Will that funding continue this year?

Chairman; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Ben Wyatt; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr John Day; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Trevor Sprigg

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We expect so.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I refer to the last dot point on page 1193 of the *Budget Statements*, which deals with the number of young Western Australians with some form of debt. What is the definition of “young Western Australians” for the purpose of that statistic? What action has been taken to address what is presumably an increasing problem?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The statistic comes from last year’s youth media survey, which relates to young people aged between 12 and 25. The survey found that 31 per cent of young people aged between 12 and 25 were reported to have debt. Fifteen per cent had debt from a car or other vehicle purchase, 14 per cent from a credit card and 13 per cent from a mobile telephone.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Has any breakdown been provided for those under 18 years?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The survey refers to 18 per cent of Australians who first access a credit card between the ages of 14 and 19; however, I am not sure whether that is transferred to debt. The Australian research indicates that the current debt for people who receive their first credit card before the age of 25 is \$2 500 a person, which is a trend that has been reflected in the past few surveys. For those between 26 and 35 years, the debt per person reduces slightly to \$1 900. The problem is that young people have greater access to credit. A number of young people are going into debt, particularly credit card debt, at a greater rate. There are problems associated with that related to their capacity to pay it back and the demands to find work to pay off that debt. In terms of what programs and initiatives the Office for Children and Youth has been involved in, I refer to another publication that I will table, headed “Managing and Avoiding Debt: A Young Person’s Guide”.

Ms F.J. Lander: We work in partnership with a number of agencies to try to develop effective programs that target youth debt. We work with organisations such as the Youth Legal Service to target their information and their counselling to young people. We have funded training across the state for youth workers and young people to advise them of their rights and responsibilities in relation to debt. The Insolvency and Trustees Services of Australia has also entered into a partnership with us around providing information. The last resort, the last thing we want young people to do, is to register as bankrupt. By working with these services, we have come up with strategies where young people are referred to financial counselling services that deflect them away from the bankruptcy route. The other thing we do regularly is community education - targeted press releases at key points in the year. Young people are the target of very sophisticated marketing and quite aggressive campaigns by banks for credit cards, and for store cards. We work with the media to promote sensible advertising and promote young people’s rights at key points, such as the end of the financial year, Christmas time and the post-Christmas sales. We try to link in with key points throughout the year to educate young people about their responsibilities and the problems of youth debt.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions on this division? If not, I will put the question.

The appropriation was recommended.

Committee adjourned at 9.56 pm