

HOMELESSNESS

Motion

HON PIERRE YANG (South Metropolitan) [11.40 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house notes with concern the plight of homeless people in Western Australia and supports the efforts being made by the government and non-government sectors to address homelessness in Western Australia.

Members may remember that at the beginning of this Parliament, I raised the issue a number of times of homelessness in Western Australia. Members may remember that I participated in the 2017 CEO Sleepout. With members' support, we raised \$6 000 for this cause. I thank those members who assisted. I remember initially walking into the chamber with members who barely knew me and they were willing to help. I again express my sincere appreciation.

I have taken a keen interest in this issue because I believe that Australia is an incredibly wealthy and lucky country, yet so many of our fellow Australians struggle in this space. The latest available data from the 2011 census reveals a difficult situation. It shows that on census night in 2011, 9 585 people were experiencing homelessness. This was an increase from the 2006 census data of 8 277 people. The data from the 2016 census will be released in 2018. But looking at the detail of the 2011 data, we see that 928 people were living in improvised housing such as tents and sleepouts, 932 people were in supported accommodation for the homeless and 2 170 people stayed temporarily in other households. There were 1 336 people staying in boarding houses, 75 people staying in temporary lodging, and 4 154 people staying in severely crowded accommodation. In total, 9 985 people were homeless on the census night in 2011.

In addition, 5 204 people were living in other crowded dwellings, including 629 people in other improvised dwellings, and 1 235 people were marginally housed. In total, the number of homeless and marginally housed people was 16 663 in 2011. What concerns me is that during 2006 and 2011 we as a state were experiencing rapid growth, yet more people were becoming homeless. This is my fear. As we have been experiencing a more difficult economic situation over the past few years, there could be a significant increase in the number of homeless people. My fear is manifested by the number of people seeking homeless services due to financial reasons. That figure rose from 11.2 per cent in 2006–07 to 23.3 per cent in 2014–15. I hope that I am proven wrong when the data is released next year.

In 2014–15, it is estimated that 23 021 people received support from government-funded specialist homeless services in WA. Of the 23 000 people, 72 per cent were adults. However, 28 per cent of them were young people under the age of 18—that is, 6 446 children. Of those who were seeking homeless services, 62 per cent were female and 55 per cent were non-Indigenous people, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in the statistics relative to their population size. It is recorded that 32 per cent of homeless service users identified as Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander female.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Just take a seat. A lot of conversations are happening in the house and I am struggling to hear the technical detail of Hon Pierre Yang. If you are desperate for a chat, take it outside.

Hon PIERRE YANG: I will continue. Of the WA population, only three per cent are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but 32 per cent of people seeking homeless services identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness. Mental health issues, unemployment and substance abuse all have a contributory effect on this issue.

Now I would like to attend to the following responses to the issue from the federal and state governments. Funding for homelessness is done through two national agreements. The first one is the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the other one is the Transitional National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. As part of the federal government's 2017 budget, it announced that it will merge the two funding agreements into one, which is now known as the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Alongside the federal government's funding, I am very pleased to see that in the McGowan Labor government's budget for 2017–18, there has been an increase for homeless services and other support services for the coming year. It has increased from \$76 234 000 in last year's budget to \$85 793 000 in the new budget. This amount includes the federal funding.

However, in addition to the government sector, the non-government sector is doing a great job. As I mentioned previously, the St Vincent de Paul Society is very good at gathering and attracting interest from the business community and raising funds for this cause. It is a leading player in the field, helping the homelessness issue in Western Australia and across the country. Other key organisations in Western Australia include Shelter WA, Western Australian Council of Social Service, Anglicare WA, Ruah Community Services, St Bartholomew's House Inc, St Patrick's Community Support Centre and the Centre for Social Impact. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list. Many other organisations provide important services to the community and should be commended.

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In addition to the services provided to the community, some innovative projects have been helping homeless people. For example, Ruah Community Services' 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign is a very unique project that is looking at providing people with stable housing as the primary need to tackle homelessness. It is targeting 50 people and providing stable housing for them. It acts as a circuit-breaker for people who are homeless. Members can imagine that when someone who is homeless due to unemployment tries to go for a job interview, they cannot get a new dress or a clean dress and they cannot make sure that they are in the best presentable form for their interview. They may not get a job from that, so they will continue to be unemployed. They still do not have money, so they continue to be homeless. This is a vicious circle. This project could act as a circuit-breaker to help people get out of homelessness and unemployment.

Another interesting project I have come across is known as the Foyer Oxford project, which is an innovative youth homelessness model that provides wraparound support for young people who are experiencing unstable housing and gives them the stability and security they need during a critical period. Foyer Oxford is based in Leederville and has accommodation for 96 young people aged between 16 and 23 years for up to two years at its facility. I had the opportunity to visit Foyer Oxford a few days ago. I was advised that it does not aim to provide crisis accommodation but, rather, provides stability and security for young people who do not have a stable place of residence but who are motivated to seek employment or training. It is aimed at providing accommodation for up to two years, but in the process it helps people to transition into private accommodation. That service has been operating for quite a while and has had some success. It is supported by a range of organisations, including the federal government, the state government, businesses and community organisations. It is a great project that encourages young people to take responsibility for themselves, their lives and their decisions, and encourages their independence, so that in 12 to 18 months' time they are able to live independently in the private rental market.

Homelessness is a major issue in our community. Any bit of help is appreciated. With a coordinated approach from the federal government, the state government and the non-government sector, we can have a positive impact on people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of becoming homeless. When the government works with the community on this issue, a better outcome can be achieved. As my learned friend Hon Matthew Swinbourn said the other day in his member's statement, awareness is the greatest agent for change. The more awareness we can raise on this issue, the more we can help those fellow Australians who are experiencing a very difficult time in their lives. The fight against homelessness will be a long and difficult one, but with dedicated people in this space I think there is great hope. I do hope that one day we can confine homelessness to the history books.

HON NICK GOIRAN (South Metropolitan) [11.53 am]: At the outset I want to commend Hon Pierre Yang for bringing this motion to the house. I have said before that Thursday mornings in the Legislative Council can contrast very, very quickly between highly emotive political debates and really excellent debates on a bipartisan basis. I commend him for taking his opportunity this morning to move one of the latter types, and I indicate on behalf of the opposition our support for his motion.

Homelessness is indeed a complex issue that affects many of our most vulnerable Western Australians. Many factors contribute to families and individuals becoming homeless and it often includes a combination of these, such as family and relationship breakdown, lack of affordable housing, lack of employment skills, substance abuse, mental illness, and family and domestic violence. The motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang seeks to underscore not only the efforts being made by the government, but also the work of many organisations within this sector that are outside government. It is only with the assistance of these organisations and the good-hearted men and women who work within them that we will be able to care and house the vulnerable in our state.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention some of the excellent organisations and important projects that are running within Western Australia. I will take the opportunity to particularly highlight those within the South Metropolitan Region, which is my own region, and some of the incredible services they provide to those who are experiencing homelessness or those who are at risk of homelessness. I want to start by acknowledging the work of St Patrick's Community Support Centre, which is located in Fremantle, no doubt quite close to Hon Pierre Yang's new electorate office. St Pat's has been operating since 1972. It provides a wide range of support programs as well as low-cost housing solutions for people who are homeless and those who are at risk of becoming homeless. One such project is called Street to Home, which aims to reduce homelessness by working with clients and collaborating with other required agencies and services. The program has a client-focused case management approach, which empowers clients to address the issues that contributed to them being homeless. St Pat's also provides numerous housing options. Hannick House offers 13 men aged 21 years safe and secure accommodation. Instead of just being emergency accommodation, Hannick House has a holistic program that helps residents make important lifestyle changes. In addition, I want to recognise the work of St Pat's that is undertaken by the Fremantle Family Crisis Accommodation and Referral Service, which currently has two homes available to house families of up to two adults and four children for 12 weeks. The families are case-managed, given assistance and linked into services throughout their stay in order to help them find permanent housing.

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I move to the work of Mission Australia and in particular the service provided within my electorate known as the youth accommodation and support service. This service provides crisis accommodation for young people aged between 15 and 18 years, also for up to 12 weeks. As well as providing a stable living environment, the program teaches young people independent living skills and provides them with emotional support and counselling. It also links with other agencies and services to help move young people who are exiting its program into long-term accommodation.

While I was parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Child Protection at the end of the last term of Parliament, I had the opportunity to visit Foyer Oxford in Leederville, which is not in my electorate. Foyer Oxford is a statewide service that fills the gap for young people aged 16 to 23 who are at risk of homelessness or who are homeless. It is the largest single-site homelessness service in Australia, with the capacity to house 98 young people, including 24 young parents and their children, at any one time.

What is interesting about this particular service is that it is overseen by a consortium comprising Anglicare WA, which provides long-term support, case management and the day-to-day running of Foyer; Central Institute of Technology, which provides education and training; and Foundation Housing, which provides and manages the facility, as well providing tenancy management. Young people who live at Foyer Oxford are expected to pay a small amount of rent, attend school or TAFE and have regular sessions with a caseworker. Since Foyer Oxford's opening in February 2014, of the 200 young people who have been accommodated, 90 per cent exited into long-term accommodation and 71 per cent were connected to employment and training. I pay particular tribute to the work of the consortium at Foyer Oxford and encourage it to continue its efforts.

In the time that remains, I will mention a fairly new organisation. I recently had the opportunity to meet with Katie Liew, the founder of a new organisation called The Underground Collaborative. Although it is still in its early stages, this initiative aims to help homeless and at-risk people acquire skills so that they can enter the workforce through a community-led approach. The Underground Collaborative will act as a link between social services, the government, local businesses and social enterprises to empower individuals, educate the community and provide sustainable impact for change. Its goal is to open a shipping container cafe in the Town of Victoria Park in my electorate to provide employment pathways for those at risk of homelessness in collaboration with other services. The project will provide employment and opportunities for vulnerable individuals to gain marketable skills for employment. It will also help connect them with the community and educate the community on the important issue of homelessness in Western Australia.

As I said, the opposition commends Hon Pierre Yang for bringing this motion to the house. The tireless hard work of these community organisations is essential and important in helping some of the most vulnerable in our state. These organisations are often prepared and willing to help out at a moment's notice and go above and beyond to help those in need. The work they do and the difference they make in the lives of so many Western Australians is important. I am pleased to provide my support to the motion.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [12.02 pm]: I rise to speak to this motion, specifically the intersection between homelessness and mental health, alcohol and other drug issues. I was fortunate to attend only a few weeks ago a sector forum hosted by Shelter WA that looked at the important intersection between the issues of mental health and homelessness specifically. The relationship between appropriate housing, good health, wellbeing and quality of life is well established, and housing is acknowledged as one of the key social determinants required to ensure ongoing good mental health. Many individuals and groups face multiple barriers to access housing that meets their needs and is appropriate and sustainable in its affordability, accessibility, safety and security. People with particularly serious mental health issues are one of these groups. It is essential that any discussion about homelessness also looks at the issue of mental health. Homelessness is a risk factor for mental health and wellbeing issues; conversely, mental illness puts people at risk of becoming homeless. Research has demonstrated that between 48 and 82 per cent of homeless young people have a diagnosable mental illness. Between one-quarter and one-half of homeless adults are estimated to have severe and chronic mental illness. A lack of employment opportunities and limited housing options, as well as the stigma and discrimination associated with having a particularly serious mental illness, may contribute to the risk of homelessness and it is also a consequence of being homeless.

People who experience mental illness often encounter economic disadvantages and discrimination in their attempts to access private rental housing. As noted in the 10-year mental health services plan, it is estimated that by 2025 between 1 474 and 1 867 Western Australians who have mental health issues or alcohol and other drug problems will be homeless. That is a huge number of Western Australians and it highlights the extent of the problem. To address this problem, it is important that people who have mental health issues have access to housing that is appropriate for their situation, and we must ensure that they have the appropriate support services around them to meet their individual needs. Again, as noted in the 10-year services plan, improving access to safe housing and the associated community support will help prevent specialised mental health treatment and the short to

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medium term accommodation system becoming congested with people who want and are able to live independently in the community. That is a problem that we are seeing right now and, frankly, it is costing us a lot of money.

We know that other population cohorts face high risks of homelessness. That includes people who live with disability and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people. Recent research projects have suggested that LGBTIQ people are significantly overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness. This is particularly a concern for young people who, upon coming out, are far too often kicked out of home by their parents. I will never quite understand that; that is not something that I would ever contemplate as a parent. LGBTIQ people often face higher levels of violence, discrimination and harassment within the community and, unfortunately, they may experience those things from potential housemates and homeless service providers. Family conflict has also been found to be a specific influence on rates of homelessness within this population group. It is important that government policies and programs recognise LGBTIQ people as a vulnerable population cohort that requires quite specialised and specific supports. As I mentioned, people with disability also experience a higher prevalence of homelessness. People with disability often have low incomes and they may have limited engagement with the labour market and limited housing options. There is an ongoing lack of houses that are accessible and adaptable to house people with physical disabilities, so improving the supply of affordable housing that is accessible and, importantly, that conforms to the principles of universal housing design would be a significant positive step towards reducing rates of poverty and providing increased opportunities for the economic and social inclusion of people who live with disability.

I also note the connection between justice, our prison system and homelessness. The recidivism rate for people who are released from prison into homelessness is twice that of those who can go to housing when they are released from prison. There are significant gaps in this area, and the community misses out as well as those people themselves. Too many people are detained in our prisons and detention centres on remand, including a lot of young people, because they do not have access to appropriate accommodation. That is a false economy. We need to look at how we can divert those funds to ensure that that is not the case. Again, it is the community that bears the costs.

The benefits of access to secure, safe and affordable housing are well understood and include a significant reduction in hospitalisation, which is a huge cost to the community; improved social and economic participation—encouraging people to get back into the employment market; reduced recidivism—the community wins; and reduced reliance on welfare support. By providing safe and secure housing we are not only providing people with the capacity to achieve better life outcomes, which in itself is something that we should aspire to, but also, through better life outcomes, significantly reducing the need for other expensive services, which delivers significant savings for government.

A recent study by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute at the University of Western Australia found that providing stable public housing for people experiencing homelessness could save the Western Australian health system more than \$16 million a year. Imagine if we diverted just half of this amount into homelessness services. The research found that in the year following entry into a public housing tenancy, the proportion of previously homeless individuals accessing health services fell significantly. This included a significant reduction in the number of people presenting to emergency departments, intensive care units and psychiatric care, as well as the number of people staying overnight in hospital, having contact with mental health services and needing prescriptions for opioid dependence. This research provides a very compelling argument for investment in public housing for vulnerable people. The research indicates that early intervention, prevention and an integrated service approach is critical to break the cycle of homelessness. Preventing homelessness in the first place is more cost effective than attempting to address entrenched homelessness. We need to ensure that we have appropriate assessment tools to identify when issues such as domestic or family violence, or mental illness, or alcohol and other drug issues are impacting on an individual's or a family's capacity to sustain housing, and then we need to identify and intervene before the situation deteriorates to the point of eviction. Part of this means that we need to ensure that the silos are broken down and support is coordinated across relevant government departments such as the Mental Health Commission, the Disability Services Commission and the Department of Communities, specifically child protection. No-one should be discharged from our hospitals, prisons and youth detention centres or mental health, drug or alcohol-related treatment services, and nor should they leave care and become homeless; that should never be allowed to happen. We need a whole-of-government approach to establish safe, affordable and stable accommodation that has an appropriate connection with community services that support people, particularly those with mental health or AOD issues, or who live with disability, so that we can ensure that people receive the wraparound services they require to live safely and successfully in our community. A significant amount of work still remains to be done in this space.

HON ALANNA CLOHESY (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.12 pm]: I thank the honourable member for bringing this important motion to the house. I acknowledge the work that he does in the

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area of homelessness and his support for homeless people. I recognise that this is a really important topic for us to debate and I indicate that the government will be supporting this worthwhile motion.

Homelessness is one of the most difficult problems in our society today. According to Shelter WA, approximately 9 600 people experience homelessness every night in Western Australia, and another 7 000 people live in insecure housing, which is one step away from homelessness. Those figures astound me. When we think about that total number of people, it is more than the total population of the suburb of Maylands. One whole suburb's worth of people are either homeless or living in insecure housing; that is a shameful statistic. Reducing homelessness and helping those who need it most is not something that one organisation can do alone, and that is why the government works with and supports a range of organisations to address the homelessness problem. I would like to take the time to thank those organisations that work hard every day to help people who are in need of shelter and support. I acknowledge and thank them for the work that they are doing. Sorry, member, I was turning around to look at you, but I have to look at the President, if you do not mind.

Last month, the Deputy Premier spoke at Shelter WA's Mental Health, Housing and Homelessness Event. He talked about the importance of stable accommodation for people living with mental illness and also making sure that the services that we come up with and the arrangements that we make actually put people first. This will ensure that the services wrap around that person as distinct from a person with mental illness having to meet certain criteria for the services they are trying to access. We know that homelessness and mental health issues pose reciprocal risks. Mental health is a risk factor for homelessness and the instability of homelessness exacerbates mental illness. It is very difficult for a person to recover from mental illness if they do not have safe and stable housing. Conversely, if a person does not have safe and stable housing, it increases the likelihood of them having a mental illness. It is because of those reciprocal reasons in particular that the draft Western Australian mental health, alcohol and other drug services accommodation and support strategy for 2017–2025 is being developed. I will just call it the draft strategy because it is going to be a very important document that will look at the key features of an accommodation and support system that enables people with mental health, alcohol or other drug issues to obtain and maintain suitable accommodation in a community of their choice. The strategy will establish a framework for stakeholders, organisations and agencies that develop accommodation and support services for people with severe mental illness, people with mild to severe alcohol and other drug issues and people with co-occurring issues, and show them what those kinds of services might look like. The draft strategy will define the housing and support options that are evidence based. It is very important that the options that we provide are the correct options that we know will work, and we know that through evidence. The strategy will also provide contemporary and known ideas or strategies to assist in that. It will recognise the needs of particular groups of people who are at a higher risk of being homeless, such as Aboriginal people, young people, people living in regional and remote areas, people with forensic mental illness history and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer young people.

The strategy will do a range of other things but I am running out of time, so I will go through quickly what they are. It will define a methodology to increase access to a greater supply of affordable rental accommodation to meet the needs of those who cannot afford housing through the private market, which is another critical point for people who have a mental illness or alcohol and other drug issues who are less likely to access safe and affordable housing in the private market.

It will identify issues and barriers to providing appropriate housing within current models of practice, including limitations of tenancy and support services. It will define priority focus areas and actions to address the accommodation and support needs of people with mental illness and people with alcohol and other drug issues.

Last month was Homelessness Month and Mission Australia released an interesting report on youth mental health issues and homelessness. I should add that Mission Australia has participated in the consultation process for the draft strategy that I talked about and it has a lot of experience in this area. The report that it released last month presented findings and recommendations from a youth survey that it conducted. One of the main issues that it demonstrated was that poor family functioning and serious mental illness are major factors that impact on the risk of homelessness for young people aged 15 to 19 years. The report highlighted that young people with a probable serious mental illness are 3.5 times more likely to have spent time away from home because they felt that they could not go back home. They are nearly twice as likely as their peers to have spent time away from home on six or more occasions. It is a really important report; I recommend that members get a copy and have a look at some of the recommendations. The government will look at those recommendations very closely in the context of its accommodation and support strategy. The strategy will include a section looking at the unique challenges that young people face such as difficulty accessing services, financial difficulties, difficulties transitioning between services, the various accommodation types that are available for young people and the difficulty of moving from one to another. It will also look at the importance of flexibility for service delivery.

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I have not had a chance to talk about the range of funding the government will provide to accommodation services and I have run out of time. Suffice it to say, I thank the organisations that provide accommodation and support services to people with mental illness, and alcohol and other drug issues.

HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan) [12.22 pm]: Thank you, Deputy President.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Robin Chapple): Acting President.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: Acting Deputy President.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Forget the “Deputy”—Acting President.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: Sorry. It is a Greens thing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Do not worry. It took me about 16 years to get it.

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: I thank Hon Pierre Yang for this motion. Homelessness is close to my heart. Knowing how many people have suffered from being pushed onto the streets gnaws at the sharp end of our community. I believe that the success of society is based on how many people it can protect or how many people we see on the streets. I had quite a few facts written down that have already been addressed; I thank members for that. I point out that we are coming from a really low base. The previous government was woeful at addressing the issue of homelessness. Throughout the last few years I worked with different homelessness groups and heard their plights. It was unacceptable to me that we were in this rich state with goldmines, iron ore, oil and gas, wind and all these amazing resources—more than many other countries that have great programs to address homelessness—yet we cannot seem to crack the edge off the 9 600 people who call the street home every night. Businesses’ doorways are the bathrooms, lounge rooms, and beds for many people and community members who have no other choice but to be there. I looked back at an ABC article from 8 July 2015, in which the former Minister for Police came under fire for blaming Perth homelessness on charities. I had been talking to some of those charities at that time. When we look back, we can see that the federal government’s 2014 budget really smashed them. Those charities had no money and were vying for a smaller pot of money to help people. I was dumbfounded. In fact, one of the reasons that I am here now is things like this. The legacy carries on. The former Speaker of the other place is running for Lord Mayor of the City of Perth. I quote from an article that states —

Mr Sutherland filmed Aboriginals without their consent at Wellington Square, an area of great cultural significance to them, before complaining about the “great vagrancy problems” in park

They are only there because of issues that were not addressed under the previous government and for so many years before that. How can the former Speaker of the other place, who was on a quarter of a million dollars a year, talk about the great vagrancy problem in our state in a park that people have no other choice but to call their home every night. It is just shameful! When we get into this game—politics—and speak to people in the community, we hear that there is no trust left in politics and when we see people doing this sort of stuff, we can understand why.

I take my hat off to people like Michael Edwards and Ron Reid from the Perth Homeless Support Group, although they always shy away from people thanking them. They are an example of people who do not want handouts; they want to have the support of the overall community to help them help people on the streets and fix the issue. They look to us to do a lot of these things such as provide emergency accommodation or as little as a locker for someone who lives on the streets every night for security for their items. That is a low-cost thing that can help people. Having their things secure is a first step to getting back into society. A bed for the night and a shower can help them get ready for the next day’s job interview.

That leads back to the casualisation of our workforce. Coming out of the boom, I doorknocked people who had no choice but to move out of their house because they could not afford to pay the rent or their mortgage because they did not have enough working hours in the week to be able to pay for those things. I look forward to working with the current government on the things it is planning on doing but, as I highlighted before, we are coming from an extremely low base. We will have to do a lot more work than we have ever done to address this issue and if the government does not, I will be there to point out that it is not doing it. That is the great thing about being here; whoever cares about this issue can give a voice to so many other people who expect us give them a hand and a help up in society.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral) [12.29 pm]: I rise today to make a brief contribution. I thank Hon Pierre Yang and Hon Tim Clifford. Since I came into this place, they have both highlighted this issue for me a lot more. There are many issues in my region but they have highlighted how critical this issue is.

One of the things I find interesting in discussion on the subject of this motion is the misconception around why people become homeless. My experience is that it has always been attributed to either alcohol or drug abuse, or people say, “It’s their fault they’re out on the street. Just go get a job”—like it is that easy. An article in the

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Kalgoorlie Miner of 5 August 2017 sums up somebody's story. The article does not name the person, but I will now touch on that story. The article states —

One of the shelter's temporary residents, Ben (not his real name), who did not want his name printed for fear it could affect his job prospects, said after nine weeks of relentless searching he knows how unforgiving the job market can be and wants to maximise his chances for future work.

Ben lost his job as a chef in Kalgoorlie because of the transient nature of the town—people come and go and there is a lot of turnover in the hospitality sector.

Being unable to afford housing did not happen overnight, but gradually as week after week passed without a job promise in sight, Ben found himself in a bind.

The biggest misconception when it comes to homelessness ... was people thinking it was driven solely by drug and alcohol abuse.

“It could be any tragedy. It could be someone breaks their leg, can't work for a period of time and ends up losing their job,” he said. “They could have lost a loved one.

“There are a multitude of reasons someone might have ended up without stable accommodation and all it takes is for something small to snowball out of control.”

Ben remembered a time where he broke his arm and failed to get work for an extended period so was forced to attend a housing service.

“I ended up taking off my cast and finding another job,” he said.

“I've never had a more painful handshake as I did when I got that position.”

That article highlights that many factors come into someone becoming homeless. I am still young, but from a young age I did not entirely understand the situations that can create homelessness, and the support base needed for someone to have a roof over their head. I recall mates being unemployed and sleeping on my couch or sleeping in the spare bedroom. I just thought it was the right thing to do to let them sleep there. But I never understood that that got them back onto their feet and enabled them to go out there to find work, shower and present themselves for employment. I now wonder what they would have done if they had not had a friend willing to do that. A lot of people are very kind and do things like that, but there are still a lot of people without that option.

There is another factor I have started to think about. About two or three years ago I was up in the north west in the Pilbara and when I was driving around from port to port to do my job, I noticed a lot of empty fly in, fly out camps and business-owned houses. For example, on the back road of Karratha there is a camp that has been—literally since the day I got there three years ago—empty. That place can house in excess of 100 people, yet it just sits there stagnant and completely empty. There are stories like that all over my region. We have heard the discussions in this chamber on FIFO camps et cetera, but I want members to put into their minds: What about when the downturn happens and it is all empty camps and empty housing? Is there a way we can work with companies, through government, to utilise these vacant houses to try to put a dent in homelessness? I strongly believe we can look at that. I think these companies with vacant houses and vacant FIFO camps should, in that sort of time, try to reach out to the community groups that are trying to combat homelessness and offer some sort of ability to use that housing. I know it is not as simple as that—I am not that naive—I know money would be involved, but a lot of community groups out there doing good things could utilise those types of facilities to combat homelessness. I want to put that idea into members' heads. We talk about camps and all that, but one of the big things I saw were empty, unutilised camps with dongas that could house people.

I also want to highlight some good work in this space out in Kalgoorlie. We recently had the Diggers and Dealers Mining Forum in Kalgoorlie, and an ABC news online article of 11 August 2017 reported that one of the drilling bosses, Andrew Smith, is making efforts to highlight and combat homelessness. The event cost \$2 000 a ticket, and during it Andrew advocated very strongly for people to consider donating in this space and lending a hand. The article states —

In his day job, Mr Smith is the owner of a successful underground mine drilling business, but after hours he volunteers with the Kalgoorlie Red Cross, and has done for 11 years.

On one trip, he pulls the van over next to a group of people camped around a fire and gets out to take orders for soup.

“Everyone congregates in their family groups, and you do get a lot of people coming from other places,” he said.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 14 September 2017]

p4031b-4038a

Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Nick Goiran; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Alanna Clohesy; Hon Tim Clifford; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Darren West

“They’ll stick around for a while. They might be around for three months, four months, maybe even longer—then next thing they’re all gone, they’ve gone back to wherever they came from.”

I found this article quite interesting because he advocates very strongly from a space that has the finances and ability to donate to these sections of the community, but he is not just out there talking about it, he is actually doing it. For 11 years he has physically gone out and tried to feed people on the streets. It should be noted in this house that there are people across the regions and in the metro area who work very hard in their own time—volunteering—to try to combat homelessness. It is the government’s job to continue to try to find a way to resolve this issue the best we can to ensure that people have a roof over their heads each night. I thank the honourable member for bringing this to the floor, and I appreciate it.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.36 pm]: I thank Hon Pierre Yang for moving this very important motion. What an addition to Parliament Hon Pierre Yang has been. Not only does he provide some cultural diversity to Parliament, but also he has a fine mind and is empathetic and kind at a time when that is very much needed in politics here and federally. I thank the member.

As a regional member I want to very briefly make a couple of points to highlight homelessness in the regions. The estimate I have is slightly outdated now, but I think the proportions will probably be somewhat similar. In 2011, 9 592 people identified as being homeless. Of those, 4 909 were identified in greater Perth. That leaves, members, 4 683 out of 9 500 homeless people in the regions, which means we punch very much above our weight in something we do not want to—that is, almost half the state’s homeless people live amongst about 10 per cent of our population. That is a very important point. Of that, nearly 2 000 of those people are in the Kimberley. We have some areas of significant homelessness in regional Western Australia. I just wanted to make that point.

I know other speakers want to have a go, but I also want to touch on the topic of some of the people who seek assistance from the specialist homelessness services in WA. I see that 39 per cent of clients received assistance as a result of domestic and family violence. I am very proud to say that this is the first government to have a dedicated Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. I could not go this year, but for the last three years Fusion and the Geraldton Regional Community Education Centre have held a Sleep in Your Car night to raise money for and create awareness of homelessness. The first year I raised the most money of all those who slept in their cars, and I was happy to help such a worthy cause. I believe that the event was very successful again this year. I would like to make special mention of Alison Hilton from Fusion, and Jenny Allen from the Geraldton Regional Community Education Centre—now called Ngala—for the work they do to highlight homelessness in the Geraldton area. About 200 people identify as homeless in the Geraldton area.

Some really good work is being done in this area. I thank the member for moving the motion. There is a lot more to be done, and may we continue to do that important work.

HON PIERRE YANG (South Metropolitan) [12.39 pm] — in reply: I would like to take this opportunity to thank those members who have contributed to the debate on this motion. I thank Hon Nick Goiran for indicating the opposition’s support for this motion. I thank Hon Alison Xamon for reminding us of the strong correlation between homelessness and mental health. I thank Hon Alanna Clohesy for reminding us of the importance of stable housing. I thank Hon Tim Clifford for reminding us that the success of a community depends on how we look after the most vulnerable. Last, but not least, I thank Hon Kyle McGinn and Hon Darren West for their support for the motion.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.