

POLICE AND COMMUNITY YOUTH CENTRES

Grievance

MS M.M. QUIRK (Landsdale) [9.50 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Police and it concerns the pressing need for a police and community youth centre in the northern suburbs. When I first became a member, there were PCYCs in Balga, Scarborough and Morley. Alas, no more. I have visited PCYCs across the state from Albany to Broome. They do great work and I want to give a shout-out to both sworn and unsworn personnel and volunteers who mentor the young people who attend PCYCs. Their commitment is outstanding.

The mission statement for WA PCYC is —

... so disadvantaged children and young people at risk across Western Australia have a safe place to go— somewhere they can feel at home, make friends and do things children should do.

In 2021, there were 275 429 attendances at PCYCs across WA. PCYCs provided 30 000 meals, had over 50 000 diversionary program attendances and more than 8 800 alternative education attendances, held 47 Blue Light discos, and had over 55 000 gymnastics visits. WA PCYC has a board of distinguished individuals, and I acknowledge their generous contributions, especially from Commissioner of Police Col Blanch, APM, as patron, and its chair, Geoff Stooke, AM, business leader and rugby tragic.

Despite the “P” in PCYC, not all PCYCs have police working within them. Similarly, WA PCYC operates relatively autonomously of Western Australia Police Force, other than on the issue of staff deployment.

Since this government was elected in 2017, the McGowan government has provided WA PCYC \$19 million in funding, and in the 2021–22 budget, a further \$18 million was allocated following our 2021 election commitment. In September 2021, a new PCYC opened in Carnarvon, and Broome PCYC received a \$1.3 million refurbishment. How is it that despite the great work done by PCYCs they do not have a greater presence in the northern suburbs? Three major local governments are experiencing significant population growth. Between 2021 and 2041, the City of Wanneroo forecasts a population increase of over 150 000. Over the same 20-year period, the City of Joondalup is expecting an increase in its population of over 19 000 and the City of Stirling has a similar projection. In the northern suburbs, the population for those aged between 12 and 24 is growing exponentially. For example, 17.5 per cent of the City of Wanneroo’s population belongs to this age group, translating to roughly 36 000 people. Notably, this percentage is higher than the greater Perth average of 16 per cent. The cities of both Joondalup and Stirling have more than 30 000 residents between the ages of 12 and 24, highlighting the need for augmented youth services. These major north metropolitan local governments are also culturally diverse. The percentage of residents born overseas is over 40 per cent in Wanneroo, it is almost 38 per cent in Joondalup, and Stirling has a similar percentage. That said, PCYCs are not the only show in town. The Department of Sport and Recreation runs a very successful KidSport program that recently celebrated its tenth anniversary. Over that period, it has contributed roughly \$36 million, supporting 100 000 kids to help pay club fees. This equates to 245 000 KidSport vouchers. Likewise, in the northern suburbs—I declare an interest as a board member—the Edmund Rice Centre WA operates activities in parks and sporting programs, especially for culturally and linguistically diverse youth, under the aegis of the north west metro inclusion project. In addition, the Clontarf Foundation operates in Girrawheen in Ellenbrook in the north east.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime notes that although youth face many challenges that make them particularly vulnerable to crime, violence and victimisation, it is important to remember that by virtue of their age, their energy and their learning abilities, young people are key agents of change in creating a better future and have great potential to advocate on behalf of themselves and their communities. For this reason, carefully targeted projects that actively involve youth, especially those living in vulnerable communities, in decision-making, education and skills training, entrepreneurship and job creation can build resilience by providing youth with alternative lifestyles to drug and gang involvement. This is a good segue to the notion that in many vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, the only positive role models these kids have are personnel at the PCYCs.

In 2016, the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee tabled its thirteenth report titled *Cultivating promise: Building resilience and engagement for at-risk youth through sport and culture*. It noted the inconsistent distribution of PCYCs in the metropolitan area, and cited with approval in particular the excellent work done at Gosnells PCYC, for example. Those programs included programs targeted at kids who had opted out of school because of mental health reasons, family breakdown, homelessness, family financial constraints, learning disorders and substance abuse, and had little respect for themselves or others.

I accept that the northern suburbs expansion of PCYCs needs to occur in collaboration with local governments. In the meantime, I would appreciate it if the minister could canvass with the PCYC management what impediments exist to rolling out PCYCs in the northern suburbs and to act to ensure that the rollout can be implemented.

Closing service delivery gaps makes good economic sense. There are benefits in investing in young people before they become involved in the justice system. Economics Nobel laureate Professor Heckman demonstrated that

a preschool program for at-risk children could deliver a social return of \$7 for every dollar invested. By the age of 20, participants are more likely to have finished high school and are less likely to have needed remedial help or to have been arrested.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Police) [9.57 am]: I thank the member for Landsdale for her contribution and for her direct and vocal support of police and community youth centres. The member reflected a little on the fact that the McGowan government saved PCYCs, but it is worth revisiting my response. PCYCs make an incredible contribution to our youth and communities right across the state. It is undeniable that they were on the brink of being lost altogether to the state when we came to office in 2017. The Barnett government had abandoned PCYCs. It had almost actively sought to remove them from the public vista. The member for Landsdale talked about the northern suburbs. It is unfortunate that Balga, Scarborough and Morley no longer have a PCYC. They actually had them, but they are not there anymore. The removal of police officers and administrative staff from PCYCs was an active decision of the Barnett government, which saw the PCYCs, by the time we came to office, face insolvency. That is a statement. That is not a claim by us; that is a statement by Geoff Stooke. He made that statement when we were celebrating, with the Premier, the opening of the magnificently refurbished Broome PCYC. What an extraordinary facility! It cost more than \$1 million, and I must say that the money for that one came from the federal government after advocacy by the state government. There was an extraordinary upgrade and renewal of that facility. I was at the opening of the Broome PCYC and Geoff, the chair of the WA PCYC, stated publicly to the media that the PCYC had been on the verge of insolvency as a consequence of the active neglect of the Barnett government and he was, publicly, very grateful for the contribution of the McGowan government. As the member for Landsdale noted, \$19 million was received and then a further \$18 million was thrown into sustaining the operational activities of the PCYCs by the McGowan government. That funding was on top of significant contributions for upgrading capital works. Basically, as the member said, the Broome PCYC was rebuilt.

The Carnarvon PCYC is an incredible place. That was as a consequence of the McGowan government giving the PCYC the old high school site. I think the government gave about \$1.1 million to upgrade the facilities. It has the best basketball facility in town and a magnificent gym, easily the best gym, which is used by the public. The gym also represents a revenue-raising opportunity for the PCYC. The PCYC has a mechanical workshop and other training facilities, which will be vital as the government conducts a range of responses to try to tackle juvenile behaviour in that town.

PCYCs are right across the state. As the member for Landsdale indicated, they do a lot of other programs. I am aware of the one in Gosnells. I have not visited the Gosnells PCYC, but I can tell members that Kensington does a similar thing. Kensington and Bunbury, amongst others, have a leadership program whereby they reach out to children who might not be attending school or engaged with the education process. The PCYC's leadership program has regularly resulted in children going back to school or training, and getting good outcomes. Therefore, PCYCs make a wonderful contribution. There is a glaring gap and a glaring lack of presence, though, in the northern suburbs, as a consequence of the neglect of the Barnett government. Its neglect resulted in a range of PCYCs having to shut.

This is a challenge, but it is one that we are looking at. At the end of her speech, the member requested that I canvass PCYC leadership, and I am. We have engaged in conversations about this. The PCYC is working on proposals. Undeniably, the establishment of PCYCs would be a really good contribution to our response across the northern suburbs to support youth and encourage them to stay on the right path. As the member noted, other players, such as the Edmund Rice Centre WA, are in the field and are doing great work, but the more the better. WA PCYC is a proven organisation with a lot of capability, and it would make sense to work towards renewing our physical presence in the northern suburbs. I guarantee members that I am focused on that.

The government does not run the PCYCs. As the member noted, a lot of PCYCs do not have a police presence anymore, but police do regularly work with them. We do not have police embedded in the administration of PCYCs. I was in Collie last Friday. Collie has a brilliant team at its PCYC, and it does the safeSPACE program, which is active in places like Kununurra and others. I am hoping that the program will be renewed in Carnarvon. The program provides an after-hours opportunity for children who might otherwise be at risk of getting in trouble to do programs and be supported for a number of hours. In Collie, they get a meal; it is fantastic. That sort of contribution could happen elsewhere and, ideally, it would be happening in the northern suburbs to address the challenges and needs confronting a lot of those communities that the member represents and has identified. Therefore, thank you very much, member for Landsdale. I guarantee the member that we will be working with PCYCs; they are already considering what might be done. We will work together to see whether we can address the sad gap in services and presence of the PCYCs in the northern suburbs.