

ROLEYSTONE NEIGHBOURHOOD FAMILY CENTRE

Grievance

MR B. URBAN (Darling Range) [9.27 am]: My grievance is to Minister McGurk, the Minister for Community Services, on the Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre. In my position as member for Darling Range, I have a wide and varied electorate with a number of strategic centres. Roleystone is a wonderful gem in the heart of the Darling Range, which Minister Saffioti knows only too well. The area has a number of key industries, from orchards filled with apples, stone fruit and citrus fruit to the beautiful Araluen Botanic Park, which I have advocated that the Minister for Tourism, who is at the back of the chamber at the moment, should add to the Tourism Western Australia destination list. Its world-class tulip festival will be held next weekend, if I remember correctly. The people of Roleystone are truly great people who are driving their community. The heart of the community centres around sports groups such as the Roleystone Gymnastics Club and the mighty Tigers football team, as well as the men's shed and the community gardens to name but a few.

The Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre is a key central focal point for this hills community. The large number of staff and volunteers at the centre provide a much-needed community service, which I will go into in depth a little further. The centre accommodates a number of key community groups, including children and families who use the playgroup, the family health nurse, the ladies group, a podiatrist, the local MLA—I rent that room out, because Roleystone is a little too far from my electorate office, and I get up there once a week—birthday parties, and the bag ladies, which is a much-needed group that screen-prints bags and sells them to try to get rid of plastic bags in the local shopping centre. Hundreds of community members use this centre regularly each week. In my view, the family centre is a great community resource and I will continue to fight to keep the centre open for the Roleystone community. I will continue to support Pat, Denise and the many staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to run, keep afloat, maintain and manage this loved community centre.

The minister has raised a number of issues with her reforms to family centres. The centre has a number of issues that relate to what they have been advised. The Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre feels that as no breakdown of the budget allocations against the two funding programs has been released, it is unable to make a viable business model. It feels that more information about the preferred budget breakdown is required for individual centres, which would make it easier for it to provide a business model. The Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre would like to see models that reflect the true models and to differentiate between programs centred on the Roleystone community. Currently, the tender process favours program-centred models, which is a one-size-fits-all approach to community services. I feel that this does not consider the strengths, opportunities and challenges of individual communities. The Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre is also concerned that this funding will no longer be location based and the community of Roleystone would not benefit if a large not-for-profit organisation won the tender. The Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre would like to request that there be an alternative model that recognises the unique challenges, opportunities and social impact of outer metro centres.

The Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre feels that the existing social capital is not recognised adequately in the tendering process. The Roleystone community has worked hard to get the Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre to where it is today and the centre is concerned that the connection with the local community may not be preserved. The delivery model that has been put forward does not understand that one size does not fit all when it comes to family centres because all communities are different. The information that has been put forward so far has put fear into the Roleystone community as it believes, without a doubt, that this will be the demise of the Roleystone community centre and a massive blow to the community's wellbeing and strength. In three weeks 1 800 members of the Roleystone community have signed a petition that will be heading to this place. The purpose of the petition is to show the impact the change will have on Roleystone. I ask the minister for her comments as the bulletins provided do not explain her intent for this review. Her explanation to this Parliament will assist by providing a sense of clarity and understanding of this process that can be forwarded to people in Roleystone. I will finish on that except to say good luck to Newcastle United in the English Premier League games this weekend.

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Community Services) [9.33 am]: I do not feel particularly well advised to comment on the football scores and I am sorry about that, but I can talk about the neighbourhood centres and the funding arrangement. I am very pleased to hear the member's advocacy and passion for his community, particularly the Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre. I have had a lot of letters from that centre, as I have from a number of neighbourhood centres. I think I counted 16 letters from that centre, which goes to the importance of having community centres, which are sometimes geographical places. They provide an opportunity for people to come and knock on the door—they may or may not know the people inside—and come in. They might be doing something like making boomerang bags to replace plastic bags or they might just be coming to a playgroup with their child. I went to the Forest Lakes Family Centre and met some women there who did not know each other before they went to the centre but, as a result of taking their small children to the centre, were able to connect with other mothers and parents, as could their children. That is how communities are built.

One of the reasons that there has been uncertainty around the neighbourhood centres is that the previous government decided to cut accommodation support to a number of neighbourhood centres and community-based childcare centres. That created a lot of uncertainty in the sector. Unfortunately, that accommodation support money was taken out of the Department of Community Services' budget and has since been reallocated; that was done under the previous government. Short of taking money from another program, I cannot reinstate that money. But we can work with the sector to make sure that it feels supported. The previous government also decided to commence the tender process that we are now in the middle of. I decided to proceed with those tenders for neighbourhood and community centres because those funds have never been out to open tender. That means that communities, particularly geographical locations such as suburbs or regional towns or centres, that have not had an opportunity to bid for that money before will have an opportunity to bid for it in the future. Essentially, that is why we have decided to continue with the open tender process.

Unfortunately, it has created quite a bit of uncertainty in the sector. I want to take this opportunity to assure the people who work in centres that are active, and who are connecting with and are present in their communities that they should have confidence in their centre and their ability to demonstrate that. We will provide support for those centres to put their tenders together. Before they formally go onto the Tenders WA website, the Department of Finance can give centres advice. The state government funds peak bodies like Linkwest and the Western Australian Council of Social Service to provide support to organisations and assist them with the tender process as well. That practical support is provided to individual organisations and we have also embarked on a genuine co-design of the criteria for the tenders. We went to those centres, individual providers and the sector's peak bodies to ask what is special about their centres in order to define what the criteria for the funding should be and to let us decide that jointly. Unfortunately, people felt early on that that was not a genuine process or a genuine endeavour on the government's part. After meeting with Linkwest and other advocates, we re-examined the criteria and I agreed to a number of changes. Some of those changes were to extend the tender period so that there could be more consultation and to make sure that we reallocated the money into different subprograms. We have reinstated that to its original allocation in case any changes created uncertainty and we will continue to work on a genuine co-design. In fact, the tenders will not be finalised until the end of the year, so people have plenty of opportunity to articulate what they like about their centres and for the centres themselves to get assistance for that process.

I want to take the opportunity to say that there has been no change to the total amount of funding. The amount of \$9.4 million has not changed. Despite the letters that I have received stating that there have been cuts to community neighbourhood centres or that there is a threat neighbourhood community centres would close, that is not the case. All we are doing by opening up the tender process for the same amount—\$9.4 million—is saying that all communities have an opportunity to apply for this money, not just those that have received money in the past. I think that is responsible government and is fair for all communities.

It sounds to me as though neighbourhood centres, such as the Roleystone Neighbourhood Family Centre, where playgroups and seniors groups meet and where people get together for craft afternoons, 12-step meetings, beyondblue meetings and the like—all important community infrastructure—are doing fantastic work. They should have confidence in their work. If they do not feel confident to articulate that in their bid in the tender process, they should seek assistance from their peak bodies or, indeed, local members of Parliament such as the member for Darling Range. This program is about enabling communities to thrive, and I have every confidence that the funding process will enable that to occur.