

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES — FUNDING

328. MR S.J. PRICE to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to the vital community services in my electorate of Forrestfield that were cut by the previous Liberal–National government. How is this government supporting and helping vulnerable people and families in my community?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member very much for the question and for being a very passionate advocate for his community. I have spoken about this before. I know the member is particularly interested in hearing about financial counselling in the metropolitan area. One of the things that happened when the previous government cut money to financial counselling was that some money was reinstated, but only half of what was previously allocated. Some geographical areas were really cut out of the process. One of the services that came to my attention in that time was the Foothills Information and Referral Service. It had provided a really important service in a small, modest building. It provided financial counselling, children’s services, and emergency relief. As a result of losing the contract for financial counselling, there was a gap. It also went on to lose its bid to provide parenting services in the area that it had provided previously. It was using those sorts of connections to link in with local families. In losing both of those contracts, it was really bereft. It was pointed out to me through the member for Forrestfield’s advocacy that a wide footprint was not getting serviced. It was not easy for people to get to other local services further afield. From the member’s advocacy through the Local Projects, Local Jobs program, the government has been pleased to announce \$50 000 to the Foothills Information and Referral Service. It will use that funding to enable an internal fit-out for computers for IT training programs, the purchase of more IT equipment, and resources for the delivery of those training programs. Members can imagine that it is a good opportunity for elderly people and other members of the community to come in and learn some basics; to get on the computer and have some support while they do that. They might also link in with other services while they are there. That is the importance of community hubs. While I was down there, through the member for Forrestfield’s advocacy, I met Anne Whitby, who is the coordinator of FIRS, and Mark Gray, who is the chair of the board. I have real confidence in that service. Its heart is really in it and it is genuinely connected to the community.

Finally, through the supporting communities fund, \$9.4 million is available for community organisations to put their hands up—not just those that have received money in the past, but any organisation—and put in a proposal. We need to make sure that money particularly reaches communities in need.