

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Community Services

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Community Services) [2.07 pm]: I rise to inform the house of the Financial Counselling Association of Western Australia's awards night, which I attended last week. As members will be aware, the McGowan government fulfilled its election commitment to reinstate funding to financial counselling services cut under the previous government. In 2018–19, the Department of Communities will provide \$7.2 million for the financial counselling services program across Western Australia. It was wonderful to see financial counsellors come together to honour each other's achievements.

Financial counsellors were recognised in various categories, including for achievements working in remote and regional areas, supporting and mentoring others, and helping clients deal with particularly tricky situations. The award winners were Jacky Hamilton, Bob Matthews, Claire Ridgers and Tarryn Mackean from Anglicare; Kelly Preece from the Pilbara Community Legal Centre; and Siobhan Meerman from the Midland Information Debt and Legal Advocacy Service Inc.

The work financial counsellors do is absolutely crucial to vulnerable Western Australians. Examples include assisting a single mother of two escaping a violent relationship who was facing eviction from her home because she had fallen behind in her rent. A financial counsellor helped get another debt waived and presented a new payment plan to the Department of Communities and a magistrate, which was accepted. The mother of two is now debt free and has even been offered ownership of her tenancy. Most importantly, she has her confidence back. In another case, a financial counsellor was helping a person with a physical disability who is nonverbal to get her finances in order, when they discovered that her carer was stealing from her. With the carer now having been charged with stealing, the disability services provider will now refund the money that was stolen.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the winners and the nominees and, on behalf of the McGowan government, I thank all financial counsellors across the state for their work in helping vulnerable Western Australians to get their lives back on track.