

*Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People — Fourth Report —
Annual report 2021–2022*

Resumed from 20 October 2022.

Motion

Hon PETER FOSTER: I move —

That the report be noted.

It is a great honour and privilege to speak on the fourth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. I note this is the first time we have had the opportunity to consider the fourth report. The fourth report was tabled in this chamber on 20 October last year by Hon Neil Thomson, who is also on this committee. The committee is chaired by the member for Murray–Wellington, Robyn Clarke, MLA; Hon Neil Thomson is the deputy chair of the committee; and the committee also has two other members, the member for Albany, Rebecca Stephens, MLA; and Hon Ayor Makur Chuot. As we learned from the report in front of us, there was a change in membership during the reporting year. Previously, Hon Klara Andric was on the committee, and Hon Ayor Makur Chuot was substituted for her later in the reporting year. We also learned from this report that there was also a change in the position of Commissioner for Children and Young People. The joint standing committee farewelled Colin Pettit, and he was replaced by Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, who I want to note is the first Aboriginal person to be appointed to the role.

As I was not very familiar with the history of this committee and when and why it was established, I did a little bit of research. I understand that the WA Parliament passed the Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill way back in 2006 and, as a result of the passage of this bill, the standing committee was created with an aim to provide an oversight role by Parliament.

Appendix one of the report refers to the committee's functions and powers. It states —

1. Pursuant to section 51 of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, a Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People be appointed by the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council.
2. The Joint Standing Committee shall comprise 2 members appointed by the Legislative Assembly and 2 members appointed by the Legislative Council.

I note that in the early sitting of the forty-first Parliament, we went through a process in which we appointed members to that committee. The report continues —

3. It is the function of the Joint Standing Committee to —
 - i. monitor, review and report to Parliament on the exercise of the functions of the Commissioner for Children and Young People;
 - ii. examine Annual and other Reports of the Commissioner; and
 - iii. consult regularly with the Commissioner.
4. A report of the Joint Standing Committee will be presented to the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council by members of the Joint Standing Committee nominated by it for that purpose.

I note that the report was concurrently lodged in both houses on 20 October 2022. It continues —

5. The Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly relating to Standing and Select Committees will be followed as far as they can be applied.

I find this annual report particularly useful as it outlines the activities of the joint standing committee over the 12-month reporting period of 2021–22. As we always acknowledge in this place the hardworking committee staff, it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the committee's principal research officer, Dr Sarah Palmer, and the research officers, Lucy Roberts and Carmen Cummings.

We learn through the report that the joint standing committee's two most significant achievements during the reporting year were the initiation of an inquiry into food insecurity affecting children and young people experiencing poverty and tabling a discussion paper on the merits of appointing a commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people. I will not go through the full terms of reference for the inquiry, but I note that it is considering the impact of poor nutrition on children and young people and the extent of that problem right across Western Australia, and also the challenges for children and young people in accessing nutritious food. I understand that public submissions for that inquiry have closed and that the report is expected to be tabled in this house later this year. Of course, I look forward to taking a look at that report when it is tabled here. The third report of the committee,

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The merits of appointing a commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people, has previously been debated in this chamber, and I know that a number of members made a contribution during that discussion.

It is also interesting to note that, as referenced in the foreword to the report, the committee endeavours through its work to uphold the rights of all children and young people to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions that affect them. That is in article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. I am quite familiar with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As people may recall, prior to my election to this place, I worked with the Department for Child Protection and Family Support for a number of years. In my role with the department for child protection, I worked with children on a day-to-day basis and a lot of those principles were used in our day-to-day work.

I also have a bit to do with young people in the Pilbara. I have been involved with the Tom Price Youth Support Association for 15 years. When my family and I moved to Tom Price in 2008, one of the first things I did was to get involved with the youth centre, and I ended up becoming chairperson of the management committee for a very long time. I want to give a shout-out to Marian Hearne, or Maz, and all her team at the Tom Price Youth Support Association. They do fantastic work both across Tom Price and Paraburdoo and in the communities in between, particularly the Wakathuni and Youngaleena communities, to make sure that our young people are looked out for and are engaged. Maz runs a lot of courses to do with harm minimisation and risk minimisation, the dangers of drugs and alcohol, driving unlicensed and things like that. I want to acknowledge the good work that they do. Maz and her team really get on the ground and listen to young people. They have drop-in nights on Friday nights. They are very relaxed. They have a PlayStation, a pool table and a basketball competition. It is a great opportunity for the youth workers to talk with the young people about what is troubling them. It is good that young people go to this service because if they need to be referred to other agencies, it is a great setting for that to take place in. Maz case manages a number of children through the centre, and has done for a number of years. I think Maz has been working at the service for over 30 years, so she has a wealth of local knowledge and experience. Our First Nations families have a lot of trust in and respect for Maz, and that helps her to do the good work of keeping our young people safe.

We have organisations like youth centres across the Mining and Pastoral Region, but we also have police and community youth centres and a number of headspaces are opening up. There is a headspace working out of the high school that covers both Tom Price and Newman, which is really great, especially for some of our young people who identify as LGBTQIA+. We have a number of those in town. It is really great that they can go to a safe space and talk about the issues and be heard. That is the point I am trying to make: it is really important that young people are heard.

We learn through the report about some of the activities. I know that I do not have a lot of time, but members can see that the committee engaged in a lot of activities over the 12-month period. Another member might like to talk about those, or I can talk about those at a later stage.

One of the briefings that the committee held was with a member of Parliament before she came to this place—Dr Katrina Stratton, the member for Nedlands. I bring that up because prior to her election to Parliament, she worked for Wanslea Family Services. She did a number of research projects, one of which was into grandparents caring for their grandchildren. The report is called *A fairer future for grandchildren* and it was published in 2021. The research was conducted during the period from 2017 to 2020 and was funded through support from Lotterywest. It is a really important report because it refers to the concerns that grandparents have about looking after their grandchildren and their limited resources. Often they do not ask for help; often they do not know where to ask for help. It is a really useful report that highlights that. When we started in this place, the member for Nedlands and I, along with Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, set up the Parliamentary Friends of Grandparents Raising their Grandchildren. Part of the work that we do in that group is to bring our grandparent carers together to talk about their needs. On that note, I will end my remarks and commend the report to the chamber.

Hon PIERRE YANG: Thank you, Deputy Chair, for the opportunity to make a contribution to the fourth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Annual report 2021–22*.

We understand that this committee has done a lot of good work in this space and I want to give a shout-out to the committee and its staff for the ongoing commitment they have to looking after the issues concerning young people and children and working with the commissioner.

I advise the chamber that last Friday night, I attended an event at the Rockingham Police and Community Youth centre with the Premier and the Minister for Police, Hon Paul Papalia. It was a well-attended event. At this event, I bumped into the commissioner, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones. We had a very good conversation. We talked about her predecessor, who attended a number of hearings held by my committee in the past. We had an exchange about the importance of state governments and local governments supporting good organisations that support young people.

Today I want to pay particular attention to one aspect of the fourth report, *Annual report 2021–22*, and that is the committee's inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children

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and young people affected by poverty, which was launched on 7 April 2022. I think members would agree with me that this was a very timely inquiry because we had been going through the pandemic since 2020; we are now somewhat leaving it behind, although there are still COVID cases. On that, I encourage all of us—members of Parliament, the public service and our community—to continue to adhere to good hygiene practices and continue to use hand sanitisers and keep our community safe.

Coming back to what I was saying, communities in Western Australia and Australia and many other countries around the world are experiencing an enormous increase in the cost of living. The hardest hit are generally the most vulnerable in our community—the elderly and children and young people. They are experiencing slower growth in their income. If someone does not have a job, they do not have an income. Many young people who are on less well paid occupations are not seeing their income matching the expenses and the inflation that we are experiencing in our community. I think it is a worthwhile inquiry for the committee to undertake. It had quite a bit of foresight because the committee launched its inquiry in April 2022 and let us not forget that the Reserve Bank of Australia started raising interest rates in May 2022. I want to commend the committee for looking at this aspect—it was ahead of many in our community—and its foresight in looking at what was coming.

I want to quote this important passage from the report, which reads —

The Committee recognises that addressing poverty is key to improving food security for children and young people; however, there remains an imperative to ensure children in need can address their immediate hunger. To this end the Committee resolved to explore the effectiveness of food relief in providing healthy food to children and young people, while also recognising that this should be an emergency response rather than an ongoing solution. Food literacy programs which educate children and families about sourcing and preparing healthy food have potential to provide more permanent solutions, and are being investigated as part of the inquiry. Other models for tackling food insecurity, such as meals provided within schools, are also being explored.

I want to refer to the staggering number of submissions that the committee received. The committee received nearly 500 submissions. Clearly, this is a very important issue, and the committee is looking at it and trying to get to the bottom of the situation. I wish the committee all the very best in its deliberations and in arriving at its findings and recommendations. The committee has been very busy at work, holding umpteen hearings and briefings, and I am sure the committee is looking forward to delivering its report in late June 2023.

I had the opportunity in 2022 to visit Foodbank Western Australia, and I also want to take this opportunity to commend Foodbank for its service to our community. I had the opportunity to go to its commercial kitchen, where it prepares food for people, and its warehouse. They are magnificent facilities. There were huge cool rooms for food that required refrigeration and non-perishables were stacked on shelves. Foodbank relies on donations from the community and also volunteers to provide that important staffing power to disseminate the food when people come in and purchase them.

I am of the view that we are fortunate to live in a community where kind-hearted people are trying to help other members of our community. I recall the days when I was earning \$8 an hour at a fish and chip shop—so that is one common occupation shared between me and Pauline Hanson—and \$8 an hour really did not get you very far. It was pretty tough and I can relate to being on a very low income when the cost of everything else is increasing but your income is not. That is a situation that a lot of families in Western Australia are experiencing. Let us not forget about the rental crisis whereby rent has increased beyond a lot of people's means.

In conclusion, I want to thank the committee for its important work and I look forward to its report when it is tabled in June 2023.

Hon KLARA ANDRIC: This is the first time we are speaking on the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People's fourth report, *Annual report 2021–22*. As a former member of this committee, and as stated in the chair's foreword, I spent some time on this committee in 2021, I believe until the beginning of 2022. I cannot exactly remember the dates. But I was a member of this committee and, as I said, as mentioned in the chair's foreword, unfortunately, it conflicted with another important committee at the time. As members know, as much as we would sometimes like, we cannot be in two places at once. In saying that, my parliamentary colleague and very good friend Hon Ayor Makur Chuot took over the role as a committee member sometime in the beginning of 2022 or towards the end of 2021. I know Ayor's contribution to the committee will be fantastic and I am sure that she brings a wealth of knowledge with her.

Members, I have spoken on committee reports a few times, but I note that on the last couple of occasions, I have run out of time and have not had the opportunity to thank the committee members and the committee staff. I will begin by doing that. I thank the chair of the committee, the member for Murray–Wellington, Robyn Clarke, and the deputy chair and member of this house, Hon Neil Thomson. I thank the remaining members of the committee, Rebecca Stephens, MLA, and, as mentioned just now, Hon Ayor Makur Chuot.

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The committee's two most significant achievements are outlined in chapter 1 of the report. The first was initiating an inquiry into food insecurity affecting children and young people experiencing poverty. The second was the tabling of a discussion paper on the merits of appointing a Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.

I thought that today, in regard to the fourth annual report, I would focus first on the inquiry into food insecurity. As outlined in the report, on 7 April 2022 the committee launched its inquiry into the most effective ways to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty in Western Australia. The motive for the inquiry was that there is an understanding of the link between poverty and poor nutrition. Poor nutrition in turn leads to ongoing mental, physical, social and learning problems. Although addressing poverty is key to improving food security for young people, it is imperative to ensure that young people suffering from poverty can address their immediate hunger.

The committee explored the effectiveness of providing healthy food to young people in poverty while also treating this as an emergency response rather than just a long-term solution. One of the long-term solutions explored by the committee was food literacy programs to educate children and their families about preparing healthy food and learning how to source it. It also explored providing meals within schools. I think every member in this house would agree that food literacy and education is a really important life skill. Educating children and families on how to source and subsequently prepare good healthy food is a skill that can be carried on for the rest of their lives. It is a really important skill to have. It is certainly something that I believe needs to be taught across our education sector and beyond, from a young age. What we eat is what we are. The effect of what we eat has impacts later on in life to do with health and other things. I think it is really important that children and young people learn these important skills that will play a big role in their lives.

As stated in the report, the inquiry was advertised in *The West Australian* and through five social media posts across Twitter and Facebook. I also understand that it was also advertised on LinkedIn. The importance of children's voices in research was recognised by the committee taking extra measures to ensure contributions from young people. Their contributions were valued. I know the committee certainly values young people's inputs.

The committee engaged consultants to produce an easy English version of the terms of reference. Children and young people were provided a range of ways to put forward and make their submissions. The submissions from children and young people remained open until 25 November 2022. I was very pleased to hear that the committee also wanted to hear from vulnerable populations within our community. That includes refugees, new migrants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The terms of reference were translated into seven languages to assist families from different cultural backgrounds where English may not have been the first language, or in some cases, their second language. It is interesting to note that the translations were in Arabic; Hazaragi, which I understand to be a Persian dialect; Karenic, which is a Sino-Tibetan language used by people in both Myanmar and Thailand; Vietnamese; Farsi Persian; Swahili and Tigrigna. Tigrigna is most commonly spoken in Ethiopia.

An easy English version of the terms of reference for use by adults with limited English skills was also produced. An advertisement aimed at engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was aired on Indigenous radio stations across the state and in various regional areas for the second half of last year, as is my understanding. I am certainly looking forward to hearing more about this inquiry. As we all know, there has been research into food insecurity and poverty across the world. There has certainly been a lot of interesting research recently launched here in Australia. I hope to make further contributions about this committee's inquiry into an extremely important issue, one that unfortunately impacts children and young people not only now, but later on in their lives. This certainly needs to be addressed and I am really pleased to see that this committee is doing that.

Hon LORNA HARPER: I, too, rise today to speak on the fourth report by the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Annual report 2021–2022*. Like my colleagues, I have obviously read the report. I thank all the members who were previously on the committee and are on the committee now. The welfare of children is close to my heart, which is something I am sure the chamber is very aware of. When I was reading that the committee had established an inquiry into the most effective ways for Western Australia to address food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty, I was very interested. I went on to do some further reading to see what they were going to be looking at. As my colleague stated, the inquiry is on its way and has had submissions et cetera. They were looking at how children and young people are affected by not eating well and how big the problem is.

I know that I have been to a couple of places that actually assist with food and meals for children. There was one I went to at Arbor Grove Primary School out in Ellenbrook. I was invited to their graduation program. I believe it was run by CLAN Midland. Every week, parents and children come along and there is a meal involved. We know that the children will get a nutritious, healthy meal that day. I have been to other places, such as Dreambuilders in Midland, where they have weekly meal nights and things like that. I got up in the chamber and talked about one young family before; the father came along every week with his children and they had a meal. The father knew

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it was a hot, nutritious meal for his children. One day, the people who were serving the meals, which are all served in individual little takeaway containers, took the meals out to the family. Because of COVID, things changed, and the meals are all served in individual containers. One of the children just sat there and looked at the food. Eventually, somebody came over and said, “Do you not like it?” She replied, “Yes, I do, but I want to keep it because we are going on a school trip tomorrow, and I want to have a nice lunch to take.” Me being me with children, I was thinking, “Oh, my gosh! Do not cry.” They were so taken aback and said, “How about we give you a meal tonight. Will you eat it and then take that tomorrow?” The child said yes and they made sure she ate the meal. That shows us the level of poverty that is out and about in our community.

It is quite scary to think that, in this day and age, these things are still continuing. These problems have been around for a long time. As a single parent, I know that making sure I had food on the table for my daughter was one of the most important things, as well as a roof over our heads. When you are down to your last \$20 and have no money coming in, your priorities change. It is amazing how well you can make that \$20 stretch; \$20 fritters away from all of us, but it is amazing what you can do with it. Thankfully, I love soup. For many of us, the only time as adults we might have some food poverty is when we are students. Anybody would know that, for some reason, noodles, bananas and tuna became the standard foods for all students because that is what we could eat—when we were not spending money on alcohol. Obviously, I am talking about other people, not me.

Inquiries that look into the reasons for things are always one of the ways and one of the steps that we can use to go forward to recognise and solve them. It is like anything in life; we must actually look at the problem and analyse the antecedents—we used to say “antecedents” or what has happened before for this to occur. People are not going into food poverty or becoming poor from choice. There are other reasons. There could be family and domestic violence reasons. The reasons could be that mum and dad lost a job or lost the house, or there could have been deaths in the family. We do not know. What we do know is that when we have community and community services around people, people are less likely to end up in food poverty. They are less likely to end up with their children having to go and live with other people because they cannot care for their children, they do not have a house to live in, they cannot feed them or they became involved in drugs and alcohol. There are so many different reasons. People do not choose to be poor. Believe me—I have been there with the last \$20 in my purse, fretting about what I was going to do for the next three days. People do not choose that.

This committee inquiry is looking at what the whole effect will be on the children. For a second, it took me back to my training and I was thinking about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which some members will be aware of. The basic need at the very bottom is comfort, which is feeling safe and secure, in a home and out of the rain or the sun—sorry, I have a Scottish upbringing so think of the rain, sun and wind—and also having food in your belly before you can move on and do anything. Before a child can learn, they need to be comfortable and feel some form of security in themselves and in their surroundings. There are lots of different things. How are these children supposed to be educated if all they are thinking about is hunger? We have schools that have breakfast clubs to ensure that children have nutrition before they begin their day’s learning and schools that offer after-school meals. All sorts of things are going on.

One of the things we are looking at is providing a sit-down lunch for all children. I remember a long time ago in Scotland, when I went to school, we had school lunches and we used to line up. How bad British school food was is very famous around the world. I have to tell members that it was worse than they think. If you have ever been presented with a plate of macaroni cheese, mashed potatoes and warm baked beans, followed by semolina, you will understand why I never went back to school lunches again. Oh, dear God! I do not think they realised we all had teeth and could chew. Today, we are looking at foods children can crunch. When you introduce food to children, you need to introduce different tastes, flavours and textures. Texture is one of the first reasons that babies will spit out food.

Having these programs in the schools, educating families on what is healthy—things that go crunch are really good for you and taste good in your mouth—saying it is okay to have treats and things like that is great. It is really important to look around at other ways we can keep our children from going hungry. We say it time and again—every dollar that we put into our children when they are young comes back and pays us massive dividends when they are older. We will have less crime in the community, less of the poverty cycle happening, and more children coming out, being productive, progressing and fulfilling their dreams when they are young. That is something we should all aim for.

I am thoroughly excited about hearing what the long-term solutions will be and what we can do to help the children, which is what the committee stepped up to do and bring this inquiry out for. I want to hear how it will affect not only children in Midland, Ellenbrook and other places like that, but also how we can look at or adapt some of these things for children across all of Western Australia, whether they live in Kununurra or Kondinin. I will get there one day! I said it almost right; we do not talk about the place called Cowaramup! It does not matter whether children are metro, country or regional, we should do anything we can to assist our children to move forward, stop the cycle of poverty and benefit the whole community.

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I say thank you again to the committee for all its hard work and everything it does.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: Anybody who knows me probably knows that I am quite empathetic, and anybody going hungry pulls at my heartstrings, particularly when the world has plenty of food and it is just a matter of distributing it and educating people. Young children going hungry is something that I find particularly unbearable; any sort of damage or hurt to children affects me greatly. It is with great pleasure that I see that the committee is looking into food insecurity for children.

I have a similar history to Hon Lorna Harper's; I was brought up in England in my younger school years, and I remember the school dinners they used to put on. The good thing is that dinner was provided to all children at the school. We were sort of required to pay for it, but children still got lunch if they could not pay. The quality of the food was very, very poor, but at least children managed to eat. As has been mentioned, for kids to learn, they need to have a full belly. Going to school without food and trying to last a full day is too difficult for learning as they grow older.

I wanted to reflect on that and on the possibility the committee has identified—that schools might be one area in which we can address this. It made me think of England first, but it also made me think of when I went to school in Australia for the first time. Then, there was a big debate about whether children were getting calcium and such so, at that time, they used to provide a small bottle of milk to all the kids in the morning. Unfortunately, the milk was delivered first thing in the morning when it was nice and cool, but it sat out in the sun until about 10.30 am when we would get it. We used to bring in Milo or Ovaltine or something to flavour it with because it lost its appeal if it was not flavoured.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: We had fly flavouring! We used to get two or three flies with our drink of milk.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: No, we did not get that, honourable member. We used to prefer the flavour of Milo or Ovaltine.

It was a way to address a particular issue that had been identified in young children. The school provided an opportunity to do that because almost all kids are required to attend school—not all kids do, but they should. Australian governments have a commitment to provide education to young people, so schools were a good venue to provide that program. It is good to see that the committee is looking at possibly taking that approach.

My wife was a childcare worker. She learnt her trade up in the north west when we lived in Karratha. She did her training in Roebourne, Karratha, Wickham and such. It was quite a while ago—she will not mind me saying that—and I can attest to the fact that even then schools used to make sure that when they had an endemic problem with children coming to school hungry, they had a breakfast club of some description. I think it often originated with teachers putting their hand in their pocket to buy lunch for kids who they knew were going hungry. If it was identified as a bigger problem, the school would put on a budget and provide breakfast, which I thought was a very good move. That is one way of fixing the problem. Hopefully, it does not use unhealthy food. My wife used to tell me that the teachers would provide a vegemite roll or something along those lines, so I am not sure how healthy the lunches were, but at least the teachers were taking their job seriously and providing some sustenance to those kids.

It is important to make sure that children not only are fed and eat healthily, but also learn to fend for themselves as they get older and can identify healthy food, food that is in season and inexpensive, and know how to prepare it. There are lots of things schools can do. When I went to high school—I am not sure what they call it now; I might be totally out of touch—I had what was called home economics. It was one session a week in which they tried to teach both boys and girls how to budget for food, what sorts of foods to buy and how to prepare it. It was pretty rudimentary; I think the most difficult thing I made was probably pancakes or something like that. But it provided an opportunity for me to learn how to cook, or get an interest in cooking, so that when I moved out of home I could cook for myself. Often, when kids leave school the only food that they know is fast food. Of course, everybody understands how bad fast food can be for you and how you tend to get addicted to it. Schools can play a very big role not only in making sure kids learn and are fed, but also teaching them how to feed themselves—how to purchase and how to budget—and they can carry that throughout their lives. It is no longer the situation that that is the province of young girls. It is probably more important, given my girth, that men learn how to cook healthily.

I look forward to the outcomes of the committee's work. It is very important. The committee can look at this area and make some suggestions that the Department of Education may take up. It has worked in the past. I know that they do not provide milk in schools anymore. I am not sure whether that is because of fluoridation of water or whatever, but the program was not seen as necessary into the future. It was important at the time and it was put in place relatively easily. Given a lot of public schools now have a one-line budget, they should be able to put money aside to go towards a program; and, if not, they could be assisted by the education department or the health department. Schools are a venue where a lot of work can be done, and I think the committee's work in this area will be very interesting and I look forward to reading it.

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Hon SHELLEY PAYNE: It gives me great pleasure to stand to talk on the fourth report of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. I thank the members of the committee in the chamber as well as Hon Klara Andric who is away on urgent parliamentary business. I want to talk briefly on this report. First of all, I want to acknowledge the new Commissioner for Children and Young People, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, who is the first Aboriginal person to be appointed to the position. I note that Jacqueline started her five-year term shortly after the committee tabled a discussion paper on the merits of appointing a commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people. I talked on the report previously and I remember it had some shocking statistics about Aboriginal people in Western Australia, given we are the largest state. Western Australian has around 40 000 Aboriginal children and young people, which is the third-largest population, and because they live across our vast state, they face many additional challenges. WA has the highest number of Aboriginal people living in remote or very remote regions. Thirty-eight per cent of WA's Aboriginal people live in remote or very remote locations.

Aboriginal children and young people make up a larger proportion of the Aboriginal population than in the non-Indigenous population. Children and young people make up 40 per cent of Western Australia's Aboriginal population compared with the non-Indigenous population, which is 22 per cent. As I said, the report tabled previously had some startling figures and really recognised the need to improve the overall health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children in their early years of life to address mental health concerns that are more prevalent amongst young Aboriginal people and to increase the overall literacy and numeracy amongst Aboriginal students. I will refer to some of the statistics. Aboriginal children and young people are 16.7 times more likely to be removed from their families by child protection services than non-Aboriginal children. There is almost three times the number of incidents of developmental vulnerability upon entering primary school compared with non-Aboriginal children. They are at higher risk of mental health problems and 10 times more likely to die of suicide. I am really pleased that the new Commissioner for Children and Young People is Aboriginal. It is a great step forward and a great outcome following the report about the merits of appointing a commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people. I also want to note that the Children and Community Services Amendment Bill, which Hon Samantha Rowe tabled in August, introduced a number of amendments that were intended to build stronger connections to family, culture and country for Aboriginal children in care, through working more closely with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. Of the children in care in Western Australia, 57 per cent are Aboriginal, despite Aboriginal children forming only 6.7 per cent of Western Australia's child population. This is the troubling reality facing Aboriginal families today, so I thank the committee for its work on improving the lives of children and young people.

A number of members also talked about another one of the committee's inquiries into ways to address food insecurity for children and young people. I want to make a couple of comments on what I have noticed out in the regions. It is an issue that is affecting not only children and young people, who are the most vulnerable people, but also everyone living in the regions. For example, the grocery store in Cranbrook has recently closed. People do not have access to a grocery store, so Coles does a delivery once a week. Hon Kyle McGinn, who was out on urgent parliamentary business, will also be aware of the Norseman IGA, which has been on the market for a long time. I commend the Shire of Norseman for its work in moving to purchase this IGA to keep it open for the community. A lot of times we see that the people in these small communities who can travel go to the larger centres to do their weekly shop, which then puts further pressure on the smaller businesses. It reduces their profit and what they have available in the local community and then the prices go up. The other day I was travelling and listening to an ABC radio interview about the price of food in Leonora and how much people pay for a leg of lamb and that a capsicum is \$11 and how this affects people in these regional areas being able to access good quality fresh fruit and vegetables.

I also commend the Shire of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. It made moves to seek funding for a vertical farming system in Kalgoorlie so that it could start this project off with a view to selling it to a private person afterwards and to then be able to produce some fresh fruit and vegetables right in Kalgoorlie and have it available for the community as well as some of the Aboriginal communities.

There has been a lot of stuff on the television lately about the quality of food at a lot of our remote Aboriginal communities, at the roadhouses. It is sugary drinks and sugary cereals and not really much fresh fruit and vegetables. Some of the members made comments about how we can work towards increasing knowledge and getting people to better understand what is healthy, and how we can make healthy meals and give children the healthy food that they need. I again commend the committee for taking up this issue and doing this inquiry. Members talked about endeavouring to uphold the rights of all children and young people to have their voices heard and to participate in decision-making that affects them throughout the inquiry.

I refer to the comments that the committee made about poverty. Some of the other members like Hon Martin Pritchard made comments about this as well. The impacts of poverty cover more than just access to food. The committee acknowledges that food insecurity could perhaps be solved by tackling the drivers of poverty such as low pay,

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unemployment and a lack of housing. Reducing poverty is a long-term proposition that relies on the federal government to take action. But being state-based, the committee was particularly interested in what can be done at the state level to help children who are going without nutritious food.

The committee also made some comments about the impacts of poor nutrition. Some of the other members talked about the impacts on physical and mental health, child development, educational outcomes and social wellbeing. If children are sometimes forced to steal food to feed themselves, does that lead to further involvement with the criminal justice system? They talked about the effects of hunger and how these effects can continue into adulthood. I commend the committee for wanting to know more about these impacts and how many children, and which children and where, are affected by food insecurity in Western Australia.

In closing, I want to commend the committee for doing this inquiry. As Hon Peter Foster mentioned, the submission period has closed, but I look forward to seeing this report later this year.

Question put and passed.

Progress reported and leave granted to sit again, pursuant to standing orders.