

KIMBERLEY SUICIDES

**60. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs:**

- (1) Is the minister aware of today's media reports that seven young people in the Kimberley, including a 13-year-old girl, have committed suicide in the past month?
- (2) If so, when did the minister become aware of what is happening; and what is the minister doing to deal with this tragic situation?

**Hon PETER COLLIER replied:**

- (1)–(2) I can say to the honourable member that I am very aware of it. The rapid incline in the number of suicides over recent months has been brought to the attention of members of this house, as recently as yesterday or the day before, I think. From my perspective, I have been made constantly aware of this situation, not just in my current capacity or role as Minister for Indigenous Affairs, but because, for a number of years prior to coming into Parliament, I was part of a youth suicide prevention committee. I am, therefore, very conscious of the high rate of Indigenous suicide, particularly youth Aboriginal suicide. It is devastating; it really is.

As I am sure the member is aware, within my portfolio we have the Western Australian Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee. That is a broad cross-sectional and cross-departmental committee that seeks to ensure that all government departments are working in collaboration to provide positive outcomes for Aboriginal people, in particular in areas of isolation and special need in the regions, and to identify areas that may contribute to the self-harm of Aboriginal youth and children. There is a raft of different reasons for Aboriginal youth suicide. I am not for one moment suggesting that I am the panacea for success in reducing the level of youth suicide. But I will do all I possibly can do, as Minister for Indigenous Affairs, to influence my department and influence the AACC to make suicide prevention the top priority and to identify as a special need the abuse of Aboriginal children, which may occur in a raft of ways—physical abuse, sexual abuse and alcohol abuse. I want to ensure that we provide pathways for Aboriginal youth that are positive. When a person is an Indigenous child and lives in one of the rural and remote areas of the state, that must be a very isolated and lonely place to be. I want to ensure that if people do get to that terrible deep, dark point at which they consider taking their lives, we provide sufficient stimulus to ensure that they see some positives.

As Minister for Indigenous Affairs, one of my top priorities is to ensure we provide gateways and opportunities for Aboriginal people across the state, particularly Aboriginal youth. I have spoken about Training Together–Working Together on numerous occasions. As Minister for Indigenous Affairs, I am firmly of the belief that Training Together–Working Together will provide tangible, positive outcomes for Aboriginal people. To ensure that we provide training outcomes for Aboriginal people, we will join the dots and link industry and government so that we can provide training opportunities and a seamless transition into the workplace.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich interjected.**

**Hon PETER COLLIER:** Last year I opened Western Australia's first Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre in Murray Street. The week before last I went to Geraldton and opened our first regional Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre. Over the next month I will open centres in Broome, Kalgoorlie and Bunbury to ensure that we have a multifaceted approach and can link with those communities in those regions. That is a start, honourable member. We will ensure that we can identify particular areas of need with those communities and work with industry and say, "Yes, if you can open your doors with employment opportunities, I will provide training." We provided an additional \$2 million at the end of last year to provide foundation skills positions for another 600 Aboriginal students. That means 600 Aboriginal students will be provided with training opportunities. That provides a gateway—a stepping stone—into bigger and better things so that that positive message I referred to earlier can become a habit. It will not be a negative habit—a feeling of despair; it is about saying, "Yes, I can achieve this and I can do something positive", and it can lead to bigger and better things. We are doing an enormous amount as a government; it is very, very important to me. I have great confidence in the AACC and I am confident that, as a result of the collaborative approach across government departments, we can continue to achieve positive outcomes.