

## **HOMELESSNESS**

### *Statement*

**HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West)** [6.21 pm]: I will be brief tonight. I just want to talk about homelessness. It is a tough discussion and a tough subject; however, there are countries, including states of the United States and cities in Australia, tackling homelessness front on. They are looking at a system called Housing First. There are many reasons that Housing First is being tried and why there is success tackling homelessness in places all over the globe. The first main reason the system works is that people need a safe, permanent home before other supports. Also, people who are chronically homeless need to be given a place where they can have a base and work on the other issues in their lives. Housing First also works for people who have been priced out of their homes. It is cheaper than running the current system we have right now, which is another good reason it works. In many countries it is working very, very well.

I want to give some examples. Finland has been running Housing First for a number of years. The European Union is now suggesting running this program in other countries. The program has been run in Minneapolis in the USA. It has also been very successful in Utah. Housing First programs are government run. In Newcastle, in our own New South Wales, a community organisation called StreetSmart is running this program. Over the first six months of running the program, homelessness in Newcastle has been halved. Not many places in Australia are having much success tackling this very difficult blight on our community.

StreetSmart was invented in New York a long time ago. It has taken a while to grow because past governments have often tackled homelessness by looking at mental health, drugs or alcohol. They find it very hard to solve people's problems when they have no base and no means of supporting themselves in any way. Attending a course, getting someone a job or looking after them in normal contemporary ways does not work because they have no home, they have no place to have a shower, they have no clothes to put on and they are not in a position to attend whatever activities may have been suggested to help them with their plight and their situation. These people need connections. They need connections to community-based groups, doctors, therapists and social workers to reconnect with their own families. They need faith groups and they need to get treatment for certain issues, whether it be mental health or physical treatment. There are a range of issues.

I am very keen to talk to anyone in the government or any party that would like to work in this area—work on helping us solve this really bad problem in our society. Housing First is a strategic approach to homelessness that prioritises permanent and stable housing for people experiencing homelessness. Homelessness is a very complex trauma. It is not easy to fix. Other countries are having success and we need to continue to monitor that and look at how we could do better ourselves.

We could go straight to the federal government to talk about the issue or we could talk to this state government. We could talk to Peter Tinley, the housing minister. In the end, it will need leadership from the very top. We would want the Premier, the Treasurer and all ministries to be involved in this, including the Minister for Health. It is possibly a bit like solving some of the Indigenous issues in our community. An Indigenous minister cannot solve these problems unless he gets help from all the other departments. Homelessness is in the same boat. There are many reasons people are homeless; they are very diverse reasons. Housing First has worked in other countries, including European countries, and other jurisdictions in America that have a similar style of life to us and a similar style of democracy. It is also operating in New South Wales. Although that is a community-run program, it has been very successful over the last six months. The number of people who are homeless in Newcastle has halved. I have all the figures; I have details. I have many more things about which I would like to talk to the government and any party or any person who is interested in helping WA tackle this blight on our community. It destroys people. We know it is hard; it is not an easy subject. It needs a lot of hard work. There are people in the world who are having success in this area. I hope that we as a Parliament can tackle this issue and have some success.