

**SEVENOAKS SENIOR COLLEGE — SANTA'S WORKSHOP**

*Statement*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [5.20 pm]: The house should not adjourn today until it hears about something that I think will gain the support and certainly the empathy and interest of members from all parties. I refer to Santa's Workshop. Members may disagree with me on a number of matters of policy —

**Hon Michael Mischin:** So he does exist.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Indeed he does, honourable member. Santa's Workshop is a group that last year celebrated 20 years in operation. It was conceived some time ago to meet a need, which was to provide toys and Christmas presents for the children of prisoners who might otherwise miss out on those celebrations that other children take for granted. Some wonderfully keen and enthusiastic volunteers have been doing just that these last 20 years or more. It has been of huge benefit to some very disadvantaged families and children, and in providing these good things, it has also provided a really useful outlet to some wonderful people in their retirement years. It is a marvellous story and it has been backed over many years. The operation has been run as a successful liaison with Outcare. Many members, like me, are former members or associate members and supporters of Outcare. Outcare was able to provide some administrative support to assist the workshop in getting grants for equipment and so on over the years. Unfortunately, Outcare is now no longer providing related services, having failed to retain contracts to do so from the state government in recent times. Nonetheless, Santa's Workshop has in all this time grown and gone from strength to strength. I refer to the number of participants involved and the number of beneficiaries, because it has now expanded well beyond the children of prisoners. I have a list here running into four pages of groups, government and private, that go to Santa's Workshop seeking its assistance every year, and Santa's Workshop is able to provide it. Last year it serviced 2 700 families in this way.

I am sure that we all support and applaud that, but the workshop's future is uncertain. The workshop moved into premises provided by Sevenoaks Senior College in Cannington 14 years ago. Truth be known, I am not so sure that that is the right place to put an organisation like this. However, the then executive officer at Outcare knew the then principal at Sevenoaks college, or whatever it was called in those days, and they came to an arrangement and managed to find some synergies. The workshop has been there ever since and it has also grown, along with the number of beneficiaries and participants. It has grown and grown and it has buildings—plural—set up there, now containing all sorts of equipment. Before Christmas, I went there to have a look at all the stock waiting to be distributed. It did indeed look like an Aladdin's cave or, as it is called, Santa's workshop. Although it is well established, and has been supported by successive governments over the years—I have seen pictures of both government and opposition members happily handing over Lotterywest cheques for quite large sums to buy the equipment that is now in situ—the trouble is that they have been told to get out of Sevenoaks Senior College. As I said, the arrangement entered into in the first place was probably unlikely, and I would like to follow up some issues about that in due course, relating to some arrangements. It seemed to be a good arrangement, nonetheless, but the volunteers have been given their marching orders from Sevenoaks Senior College, and I am not sure why. If that is what it is, then that is what it is.

Post Outcare, Santa's Workshop has had to set itself up as its own legal entity. It has obtained charity status, and it has a relatively new president—a chap called Martin Dorman, with whom I have been working. He is a retired successful businessman around this town. Perhaps some of us have had built-in wardrobes made by one of his companies. He is determined to make sure that Santa's Workshop is not allowed to die. A lot of participants and others are beneficiaries. I have been working with him, and it is a hard thing to find somewhere to accommodate this operation, which goes on all the time even though it has peaks of demand. We are looking at a range of options, but these things cannot be done overnight. There has been public investment, including a lot of Lotterywest money, into the assets that Santa's Workshop has there now, that really belong to Outcare, which is no longer in that business.

The current state of play is that the premises at Sevenoaks are vacant of Santa's Workshop, but its equipment is still there, for now. In due course, what will happen to it all? It will be scrapped, unless it has somewhere to go. An operation like that cannot be mothballed, because all the volunteers will be gone. They will not just hang around. We must maintain continuity. I am pledging to use my best endeavours to work with people such as the Canning Agricultural Society, and with Arthur Kyron and the people at the City of Canning, to look at a range of options. I am working with Martin Dorman and others. However, the idea that it can be mothballed for now and that a place will be found sometime, somewhere, somehow, is a nonsense. Santa's Workshop is in danger of being no more, and I think that is an awful thing. I do not know how many groups of beneficiaries I have listed on the four pages in front of me, but an awful lot of people will be sold short of a benefit that they can get for free.

How many members do we see going around, getting their pictures in the papers and handing over Lotterywest cheques for millions, for things like men's sheds? What is the difference? The same sorts of benefits, if not more,

are provided by Santa's Workshop volunteers, and they produced a product, as I said, for 2 700 families last Christmas. It would be terrible if we allowed that to wither on the vine, but that is what it is confronted with because the workers cannot work where they are now.

**Hon Sue Ellery** interjected.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I will conclude in just a moment, but there was something I wanted to say directly to the Minister for Education and Training.

I have pledged to the volunteers that I will do my best—I have been working on it—to find some new accommodation so that we can have a transition and then an ongoing operation. That will be beaut! But in the meantime, Santa's Workshop does not have a substantial home at Sevenoaks Senior College. It has been kicked out and all its assets will basically be scrapped and not available. The organisation is in a very precarious situation. It has some very dinkum volunteers, but I do not know whether they are in a position to start again from scratch and I do not see that they should have to.

I am very glad to see my colleague the Minister for Education and Training listening to this because I would like to work together, and with any member who is interested, to see whether we can find a way ahead. In the first instance, Santa's Workshop has been operating at Sevenoaks Senior College for 14 years. I do not see why that cannot maybe continue for another year or two while I and other like-minded members find a new place for them to be. It is all there. The kids know them; the school community reckon they love them. Hell, who does not love something called Santa's Workshop? They even have old blokes with white whiskers and everything.

I think I have made my point clear. I seek assistance in the first instance from the minister, so perhaps we could have a dialogue out of the chamber and progress the matter.

*Statement*

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training)** [5.30 pm]: I want to respond to Hon Simon O'Brien's statement. The honourable member flagged to me behind the Chair that he was going to raise an issue and I am happy to undertake to look into it. However, I make this point: if he had told me an hour ago what it was about, I probably would have responded now. But in any event, I will undertake to do that. I did try just then to see whether I could get something quickly out of my office, but if I had had more time, I would have been able to respond to the member. I am happy to look into the matter and get back to him.