

Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Linda Savage; Hon Ljiljana Ravlich; Hon Ken Baston; Chairman; Hon Dr Sally Talbot

Volunteering in Western Australia — Economic Value — Statement by Minister for Seniors and Volunteering — Motion

Resumed from 6 April on the following motion moved by Hon Robyn McSweeney (Minister for Seniors and Volunteering) —

That the statement be noted.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I will start my remarks by saying that it is quite remarkable that the minister commissioned a report on something that we already know based on commonsense. It seems that it is a trend these days to use intrinsic economic value to rate the importance of things. If something has no monetary value, we are not too sure whether it is important; the higher the monetary value, the more important that thing is.

For those members who did not have a chance to read *The West Australian* dated 13 April 2011, we have finally been able to put a price on unpaid housework, so members need to be more appreciative of their wife or husband who does the housework because now we know they are very valuable, thanks to those research experts—how can we politicians survive without them? I hope the minister read the report word-by-word for its monetary value.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: The minister reads everything.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: That is good; I am glad to hear it. The minister got her money's worth.

According to the report, the economic value of volunteering to the community in Western Australia in 2006 was \$6.6 billion. That has to be very important because we are talking about billions of dollars, not millions of dollars. Based on that, all those volunteers across the whole of WA deserve a pat on the back and acknowledgement from the minister, which she has done on a number of occasions. Of course, no doubt the minister's acknowledgement also extends to the volunteer centres across Western Australia.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: It certainly does.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Yes, but the thing is that all those people who manage the volunteer centres do not want to hear this kind of praise because they have heard it so often in the past.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: No; they enjoy their praise. They need praise. All our volunteers need a lot of praise.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: This kind of praise does not address their concerns and issues. In some circumstances, it can be interpreted as patronising. Is the minister aware of this?

For as long as I have known the volunteer centre in the Goldfields, the issues it faces have not changed. It is still struggling to deliver its core services with the current level of funding. The centre has a three-year agreement with the state government. The first year is a fixed amount and a two per cent funding increase for the second and third years of service. Let me put this from another perspective. The volunteer centre in Kalgoorlie receives \$90 000 annually in funding. However, 76 per cent of that \$90 000 comes from the commonwealth government. This government gives the volunteer centre in Kalgoorlie only 24 per cent of that money. That equates to \$22 000. It is ironic that a service that is so valuable to Western Australia receives such a small contribution from the state government. Does the minister want to know what I think? I think the minister should use the funding for this report to increase the funding for volunteer centres right across Western Australia. The volunteer centre in Kalgoorlie requires two full-time staff to run the place. However, it is currently being run by a full-time coordinator and a part-time staff member for two days a week. That means that most of the work falls on the shoulders of one person, and that person is often distracted by the daily activities of running the centre and is struggling to manage to deliver the centre's core services.

The volunteers whom we get in Kalgoorlie are very diverse and unique. They range from residents in Kalgoorlie–Boulder to fly in, fly out workers, mostly miners, geologists, drillers and engineers, who do not want to spend their spare time drinking in the pubs. But these volunteers need to be trained, or at least be given a quick lesson in how to be volunteers for the Red Cross, the meals on wheels program or the adult literacy program. Bear in mind that they need to be trained only once. If they have a good experience on their first go, they will be more willing to become volunteers in the future, no matter where they may go. However, if they do not have a good experience the first time, it is more than likely that we will lose them as volunteers. The people who run the volunteer centres do not want to hear about the economic value of their volunteering. What they want to hear from the minister is that their funding will be increased. A little extra funding will go a long way. This government can afford to do that. We are not talking about millions of dollars.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: You are not talking about what your government did, because you are embarrassed!

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: The minister is just complaining! That is what she does best!

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We are not talking about millions of dollars. We are not even talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars. We are talking about only \$30 000 or \$40 000. That sort of funding could provide some relief to those centres.

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich: Hear, hear!

Hon Robyn McSweeney: I wondered where she was!

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Bear in mind that the volunteer centres provide services to not-for-profit organisations. The quality of the services that are provided by volunteer centres has a direct impact on those not-for-profit organisations. The services that are provided by volunteer centres also reduce the costs for not-for-profit organisations. Another thing the minister should be aware of is that it is a challenge for anybody to take on the job of coordinator of a volunteer centre. That is because the expectations for that person are very high, from both ends—both the funding providers and the receivers of the service. The job itself is not attractive financially, particularly in the Goldfields, where people can just go out and get a job on a mine site for a much higher pay than the average income in Western Australia. I hope the minister knows how much the coordinators in volunteer centres are paid. However, it is not financial benefit that these people are looking for.

In conclusion, I want to thank all the volunteers in Western Australia for their contribution. I also want to thank the volunteer centres for their contribution. I hope their request for an increase in funding will not fall on deaf ears.

Hon LINDA SAVAGE: I also want to use this opportunity to speak about volunteers, and to endorse the comments that have been made by Hon Helen Bullock about the value of volunteers, and about the staggering amount that they contribute to the community of Western Australia by providing services that taxpayers would otherwise have to pick up. It is very hard, given that there are so many outstanding volunteers in Western Australia, and so many unsung heroes who work tirelessly as volunteers, to focus on just one volunteer. But I would like to speak about one volunteer whom I have come to know. That volunteer is Mrs Margaret Lay. Margaret Lay was recently awarded the WA lifetime award for contributing to volunteering at the recent International Year of Volunteers 2011 gala awards presentation dinner.

I would like to provide a bit of background about Margaret Lay and why I nominated her for the award that she was subsequently awarded. Margaret Lay was born in Western Australia in 1928 and grew up in Perth. She trained as a home economics teacher. At the age of 23, she married her husband Tom, and over the next few decades she accompanied him on his various postings around Western Australia, because he was a state schoolteacher, and then a principal. In their first 18 years of marriage, they moved 14 times, and during that time she raised three children. About 30 years ago, when they were living in regional Western Australia, someone very close to Margaret gave birth to a baby boy who died shortly after being born. Because the young mother was unwell, and the father had to return to work, Margaret was the person who took on the arrangements for the funeral. As Margaret told me, she found that there was nothing in place to refer to, and no template for such a funeral, but just a lot of things to do in the middle of the family's grief and confusion. She said she did not even have a robe to dress the baby in, as the mother's set of clothes for the baby was back at the farm, because of course the family had expected the father to bring the going-home clothes to the hospital when his wife and baby son were discharged. After that experience, Margaret was determined that she would find a way to make sure that no other young families would ever have to go through that sort of experience.

I should say how I came to know Margaret and why I have visited her at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, where she has done 30 years of volunteering work. I first visited Margaret Lay because I had heard about her from my mother-in-law. About 10 years ago, my father-in-law died. My mother-in-law had nursed him for many years, because he had had Parkinson's disease. After my father-in-law died, I had some concerns about my mother-in-law, because after having been a full-time carer, she was suddenly left bereft. But I knew that she was an outstanding knitter and good at sewing because I had been the recipient of many of her knitted items—as had other family members—and I knew she was particularly good at making clothes for babies and infants. I contacted the social work department at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and explained about my mother-in-law and that I knew about its program whereby teams of women volunteers knitted and sewed clothing for children, so the social work department got in contact with her seven years ago and she has been one of the team of volunteers for King Edward hospital ever since.

Over the years I heard about Margaret Lay through my mother-in-law, and earlier this year I finally met Margaret face to face and saw the work being done at King Edward hospital. Margaret has been a volunteer at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women since the early 1980s, initially as a member of the auxiliary. She told me that that folded in 1986 because everyone was so ancient, as she thought she herself was at that time although she was only in her 50s. The small group that was left decided that they would continue, and, as it happened, Margaret found herself leading and coordinating the group. Since 1986, her role has developed into being the organiser and coordinator of the sewing, knitting and crocheting work done by the volunteers, who

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have numbered in the hundreds over the years, and over 100 still work for her and the hospital. When someone expresses an interest, it is her job to contact them, assess their skills, and ascertain what type of work they would like to do. Margaret and Pat Miller, a friend of hers, have done fascinating work over the years to ensure that the work they and the volunteers produce would serve the needs of the babies of King Edward hospital and produce the needed items, not just the hundreds of items needed each year to ensure that young mothers do not go home without any clothing for their newborn babies, which, unfortunately, is a big part of the work they do. Margaret—along with Pat and others—has worked to also find ways to provide items of clothing and toys for particular situations for babies born at King Edward hospital.

Margaret told me that approximately 800 babies born at King Edward each year do not survive. Those delivered at less than 20 weeks are buried in the gardens of King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women; of course, babies born after 20 weeks have a funeral. Margaret and Pat Miller started to realise that these teeny babies buried in the remembrance garden at King Edward hospital did not have clothes, so they began cutting and making teeny robes for the babies to be buried in, including beautiful little baskets and layettes, which I saw when I visited. Their work has now extended, and they now even make little robes for Muslim babies. These robes have very specific cultural requirements, such as that the robe must be white and have no hem or fastenings on it. These women are very, very sensitive to the feelings of others, and some years ago the chaplain raised with them that he had noticed that when younger brothers and sisters were saying goodbye, they expected that the little tiny baby would have a nappy on, as young children would, so Margaret and the volunteers even go as far as making a tiny nappy for these infants.

Margaret told me that they never have contact with any of the families that they do this for, but they are told of the families' reactions. Margaret says that as much as they give, they get back 100 times over by knowing they are doing a small thing to ease someone's distress at a terrible time. Margaret and her friend Pat have also designed and cut out other articles, such as the "tadpole"; a tadpole-shaped cushion filled with soft beans, used for positioning babies with broken or dislocated limbs sustained during delivery. They have also developed a pattern for papooses, which are for babies born addicted to heroin or other drugs because of their mother's addiction. These babies experience withdrawal for weeks after birth and need to be closely and safely held, and the papoose provides the means to do that. They also make tiny, oval-shaped pouches with a collar and padded base for the very, very premature babies who are so tiny and floppy that they cannot be picked up, but the staff and mothers need to be able to hold them, and these little pouches enable them to be held very, very gently.

Another of the dozens of items that Margaret and her team produce are "feely hearts", which are little fabric hearts that are filled with soft material. Members may have noticed the bowls full of these little squeezable hearts around King Edward hospital, and they just sit there so that anyone at any time can pick one up if they are feeling distressed and need something to hold onto. I thought that was such an insightful and appropriate thing to have thought of and to have quietly provided.

Throughout the 30 years that Margaret has been a volunteer and the coordinator at King Edward hospital, she has worked within the existing structures to fulfil needs that she and the others have become aware of, or when needs have been identified and a solution has been sought from them. Along the way she has encountered new circumstances, such as the needs of addicted babies. In all these cases I think she has acted incredibly practically and compassionately. As she said, she did not know that the role would turn out to be quite so diverse, ranging from drafting patterns for the pouches and papooses, to teaching the volunteers how to do things like buttonholes if they are not so experienced at sewing. Margaret describes herself as just being "one of the King Edward Memorial Hospital volunteers", but having met her on several occasions and hearing about her over the years from my mother-in-law, I am certain that her self-effacing, very approachable leadership style has enabled her to provide the leadership required for such a large and diverse group of women, including my mother-in-law. I do not think the work would have continued without someone like Margaret, with her particular qualities, to take the lead.

As Margaret says, some of the volunteers come to King Edward hospital because of something they have experienced in their own lives, as she did. She, of course, recognises that it is a two-way street, and she works towards helping to make sure that the experience is equally rewarding for the volunteers. She told me stories about the volunteers—including the many in regional areas—and one that really resonated with me was about a lady in Merriwa who makes one little teddy each evening to be used in one of the little layettes that is presented to a family. She also told me about the volunteers who contact her and say they are about to go off caravanning into the warmer weather for their annual retreat, so she sends them out packs of cut-out clothing to sew while they are, presumably, sitting outside their caravan in Carnarvon, and they hand them back when they come back.

For over 30 years Margaret has been thinking of the needs of babies and their families at King Edward Memorial Hospital by designing, drafting, sewing, knitting and crocheting. She leads by example. The influence that she has on others reflects the outstanding work done by the volunteers at King Edward Memorial Hospital. Again, I

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would like to say how absolutely delighted I was to see Margaret receive an award. As Hon Robyn McSweeney and Hon Sue Ellery, who were at the awards evening, could testify, Margaret was delighted with her lifetime contribution to volunteering award. She showed her feisty and delightful side in her acceptance speech when she received the award. She and her husband, Tom, had a very enjoyable evening at the ceremony at the Burswood ballroom on Wednesday, 11 May. Margaret and all the other award recipients were enormously worthy recipients of the award and outstanding examples of volunteers in Western Australia.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I also rise to congratulate all those people who give so freely of their time performing good public services to a range of organisations and people in need. Tonight I specifically want to pay tribute to an organisation called Manna Incorporated. It is a registered charity. Its mission is to decrease poverty, reduce localised crime, minimise hunger, change societal attitudes and support the disadvantaged. That is a pretty good mission statement. It needs to be commended for that. I met with Bev Lowe at 11.30 am on 6 April. She and her husband are the founders of Manna Inc. Manna Inc is a charity. It receives no funding from the government but is desperately in need of assistance. A number of issues came up during our discussion. The one that struck me is the extent of this operation and the volunteers who are used and the discovery that they do not receive any government support or funding.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: How long have they been operating?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: For years and years.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: They are very good.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes, they are very good. I was shocked when I learnt how Manna Inc started. It started in 1996. Two retired farmers drove past a group of homeless people gathering in an inner city car park in Perth. It was raining and cold. Bev Lowe turned to her husband, John, and said, “Let’s go home and cook soup for them.” When she told me that, it really touched a part of me because I love cooking too.

Hon Donna Faragher: So you can cook?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes, absolutely. I love cooking. I cook every weekend.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: She’s a country girl at heart.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes, I am really a country girl at heart. Bev must have a loving husband, John, who will do anything for her because this has developed into a lifelong commitment. Not many people are prepared to take on a task as they did and grow the operation. They are still providing thousands of meals on an annual basis and expanding the full range of services that they provide. I want to quickly touch on some of those services. When I met with Bev, she said that she was inspired by the great, late—I think she has passed away—Margaret Mead, who I think was either an anthropologist or a sociologist.

Hon Kate Doust: An anthropologist with an interest in Easter Island.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: She was an anthropologist and her specialty was Easter Island. What really motivates Bev and John is a saying by Margaret Mead: “Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. For, indeed, that’s all who ever have.” They operate around that philosophy and do some amazing things. They have approximately 200 volunteers. A lot of those volunteers come in time and again and have been with them for years. For example, they provide all their services free of charge. They provide meals six nights a week.

A three-course meal and a drink are served by their volunteers in an inner-city car park. They serve come rain, hail or shine to about 100 to 140 men, women and children standing or sitting on the ground, as there are no facilities available for them to eat any other way. They also provide an additional 160 meals for the Salvation Army for distribution and provide a shopfront in Maylands with meals when necessary. They give everybody a present at Christmas, making sure that that is a special day of the year.

I also want to put on record that a lot of Manna Inc’s clients also happen to be people with mental illness, homeless people, people who have had a pretty hard life or who have fallen on hard times, people who are disadvantaged or people who for whatever reason cannot get themselves out of the position they are in. I am concerned that, with the Queen coming and with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to be held here in Perth, which is a historical event, we know that homeless people will be pushed out of —

Hon Robyn McSweeney: No.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Is that not true? What is the happening to the homeless in the CBD?

Hon Robyn McSweeney: We are going to move them out of the CBD. They are going to be given help. If we know who they are, we can offer them help and assistance and hopefully get them into a program so that they can get out of the cycle of being homeless.

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Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am glad to hear that.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: Would you like them to remain on the street?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: No. I ask that the minister meet with Mrs Lowe and I or anybody else who might be interested to ensure that there is ongoing dialogue. We have 140 people who are affected, maybe 190 or 200. I do not know how many people will be affected.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: I meet with whoever writes to my office and whoever wants to meet with me.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I will definitely send Mrs Lowe a copy of my speech. The point I am making is that it is one thing to say something but it is another thing just to say it and leave it here.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: I always do what I can.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The minister is pretty good to deal with—I put that on the public record—unlike some of her colleagues. The minister has given that commitment in the house. It would be really good if we can see this commitment carried through to ensure that all these people who are served a three-course meal and a drink six nights a week in the inner city parks by Manna Inc—there may be other organisations who tie into all of this; I am not sure—

Hon Robyn McSweeney: There are. I often go out with them, and I speak to the homeless. I have done that many a time.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: We need to ensure that a proper strategy is put in place by the minister's department. We need to work with these volunteers in a cooperative manner. We need a positive, forward-thinking-type strategy that can be fully implemented so that the homeless people are not disadvantaged. We do not want to see them dispersed under bridges not knowing where to go to get a meal.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: That will not happen, I assure you.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: This organisation puts together food parcels, provides blankets in winter, organises flowers and catering for funerals and so on and so forth. I was very impressed by what I saw and heard when I met with Mrs Lowe. She obviously runs a very tight ship. She is a good woman with a heart of gold and I put on the record my appreciation and that of all the people she looks after, together with her able husband, John. I now publicly thank Beverley and John Lowe who have my support and who, I hope, have the government's support. I hope the government —

Hon Liz Behjat: Can I interject?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: No, no; I have only 46 minutes.

Hon Liz Behjat: You can stand again.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes. I will take an interjection.

Hon Liz Behjat: Don't they receive funding through Derbarl Yerrigan?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Nothing!

Hon Liz Behjat: I might stand corrected, but I think Manna is funded through Derbarl Yerrigan, which gets its funding through the health department.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: When I met with Mrs Lowe she told me that she does not receive public funding. If that occurs —

Hon Liz Behjat: If you go to its website you will see it is supported by Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service Inc and it is, I think, government funded.

Several members interjected.

The CHAIRMAN: Order, members!

Point of Order

Hon KEN BASTON: I draw to your attention, Mr Chair, that there are only 10 minutes left in which to seek the call.

The CHAIRMAN: My apologies.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I will not take all that time.

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The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. While there is a break in debate, I must inform members that we really only go to six minutes on the bottom clock, because from the outset only 43 minutes were allocated for this ministerial statement.

Committee Resumed

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I want to name the remaining people of this great organisation—chairperson, Peter Buchanan, an engineer; the vice chairman, Phyllis Duncan; the secretary, Patricia Thiel; treasurer, Jarrod Maguire; and members, Andrew Bower and Evolt Giorgio.

Hon KEN BASTON: I rise to welcome this statement valuing volunteers. I believe the minister stated that volunteering was worth some \$6.6 billion to Western Australia. I recently visited Carnarvon after the floods of 18 December 2010. I was impressed by the number of volunteers and the role they played in saving the town by working all night to deliver soil to the levy banks to prevent the town from flooding. During a visit to the control centre, I was impressed by the input of FESA and shire council workers as they cared for those people who were stranded in the outer areas on the plantations, and in the Upper Gascoyne and Murchison areas, and even up towards Exmouth shire. These volunteers, manning a control phone room, were individually ringing people to check on their food supply levels—bearing in mind some of these properties were cut off for three weeks. They made sure food was loaded onto helicopters and sent to the right people et cetera. The volunteer atmosphere was very positive. When I arrived, I was told that many of those same volunteers had had only one hour of sleep the night before, because they had been working all night. It made me realise the fantastic effort that volunteers put in. I congratulate them all on their efforts.

I believe that when changing laws and making regulations, governments need to look at how those changes will affect volunteers. I refer to liquor licensing in the Kimberley. The St John Ambulance drivers in the Kimberley are all volunteers—there are some 40 of them in Kununurra alone and more in Wyndham. I met with the then new police sergeant—I think he is still working in the town—and he told me about the change whereby alcohol could not be bought until five o'clock in the afternoon; previously, people had been able to buy it from 12 o'clock, Monday to Sunday. That change did not stop people from drinking; it just changed the time they drank, resulting in volunteer ambulance drivers having to work later—between midnight and one o'clock in the morning. They are all volunteers. I have to say that volunteering between six o'clock and eight o'clock is very different from volunteering between midnight and one o'clock in the morning. The volunteers were hit hard by that change. Interestingly, the police suffered too. Their shift change is at midnight—right in the middle of the alcohol problem. This meant the police were on overtime as they dealt with the outcome of the change to the law.

When I first met with the local police sergeant, he said that he had thought it a good idea to change the time alcohol could be sold to five o'clock because the police would be able to get more work in the form of their normal police duties, such as delivering summonses et cetera to people and picking up people for court cases. However, that change has increased the load on police. The recent feedback is that the time should be put back.

The point I wish to make is that we need to consider volunteers when making laws. Wyndham is a smaller hospital facility and many people with problems have to be driven to Kununurra, a distance of 90 kilometres, and back again by a volunteer ambulance driver. That now happens at one o'clock in the morning, but the volunteer still has to get up in the morning to fulfil his normal work duties—wherever that may be.

I commend all volunteers for their efforts and I believe that in government we need to think of them when making decisions and putting regulations in place.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will make a couple of quick comments. This ministerial statement contains some magnificent data that I believe we will be able to use, along with the data in the final volunteer report now on the department website, for some years to come.

I wish to comment about the number of young people aged between 18 and 24 who volunteer. I notice on page 17 of the report the minister referred to in her statement that 33 per cent of young people between the age of 18 and 24 volunteer. I compare that to the figures cited in the excellent article by Craig Comrie called, "A few things you won't read on Page 1", posted on 17 November 2010. Mr Comrie refers to a Mission Australia annual survey of young Australians report. I draw the minister's attention to the claim that 58.5 per cent of young people volunteer; that is, nearly two-thirds of young people have told the Mission Australia researchers that they undertake voluntary work. I think it might be well worth the minister directing her officers to look at that report to determine if some of the data about young people is worth updating.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: I have read that report and I think the member is quite correct in pointing out that our young people volunteer. Some people think volunteers are all seniors, but our young people are volunteering too.

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 18 May 2011]

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Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is correct minister; thank you for your interjection. I will finish with Mr Comrie's words when he said, "Every day in my work I see young people doing amazing things—including volunteering."

Question put and passed.