

Chair; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Sabine Winton; Ms Merome Beard; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Meredith Hammat; Dr Katrina Stratton; Ms Mia Davies; Hon Dave Kelly

Division 35: Communities — Services 1 and 3 to 6, Early Childhood Education, Child Protection, Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Community Services —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Ms S.E. Winton, Minister for Early Childhood Education.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General, Department of Communities.

Dr N. Leggett, Director, Office of Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence.

Mr P. Payne, Deputy Director General, Profession Standards, Regulation and Quality.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr B. Whitehouse, Executive Director, Statewide Services.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Early Childhood Education.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. I will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information she agrees to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the significant issues impacting the agency on page 506 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Paragraph 10 is under the heading “Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence”. Where is the funding to provide GPS monitoring of family and domestic violence offenders?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. That is a line item in the Attorney General’s budget. It is not funded through my portfolio.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, minister. Does the minister have an understanding of when that legislation will be introduced into Parliament?

The CHAIR: Since that is a different portfolio, I do not know whether you can pursue that at this stage.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to answer that.

The CHAIR: All right. Thank you, minister. That is very generous of you.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will repeat what I said in the Legislative Assembly I think last week. It is a priority piece of legislation and will come to Parliament as soon as it is ready.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you.

Ms M. BEARD: On page 503 is the line item “Child Protection Regional Workforce Attraction and Retention”. I have a query about the decrease in funding. Can the minister explain that to me?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry; can the member repeat that? She is very softly spoken.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to the line item “Child Protection Regional Workforce Attraction and Retention”. There is no funding in 2025–26 and the subsequent years. I am wondering whether the minister can explain what that is used for.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As the member knows, it has been a priority of mine since I became the minister, and certainly it is a priority of the department, to ensure that we have a well-qualified and supported workforce right throughout the state, particularly in regard to child protection staff. We know that they do incredible work and so we are doing everything we can to ensure that we can attract and retain staff right around the state, particularly in some of those places where it is harder to attract and retain staff. One of the initiatives that we have been working hard on and is making a difference to the vacancy rates in those areas is the regional attraction and retention incentive whereby we are offering further incentives on top of the existing incentives for people to move into those areas. That has been well received. As at 31 March 2024, we have filled 402 RARI-eligible positions. In some of the places where

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it is more difficult to work, it is a significant incentive. In places like the Kimberley and the Pilbara, it means an additional \$13 000 for child protection workers on top of some significant incentives to work in regional and remote areas. I am very proud of the work that the child protection staff do. It was a key priority to keep supporting them and ensuring that we have qualified and capable people doing critically important but nonetheless challenging work.

Ms M. BEARD: I totally agree with the minister about the job they do. Those 402 positions are regional. Is there any way we can get a breakdown of the locations?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The RARI incentive that we put in place relates to *Commissioner's instruction 38: Temporary regional attraction and retention incentives* and applies specifically to the Kimberley, Pilbara, midwest, Gascoyne, goldfields, Esperance and wheatbelt regions.

Ms M. BEARD: I will reframe my question. What are the vacancy rates in each of the towns in each of those regions?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I can confirm that at this point in time, the statewide vacancies for child protection staff is 10 per cent.

Ms M. BEARD: Can we not break it down by location?

Ms S.E. WINTON: We can break it down. As at 31 March, there is a statewide vacancy rate of 10 per cent for child protection. In the metropolitan area, it is nine per cent and in the regional area it is 13 per cent.

Ms M. BEARD: Will other strategies be put in place in 2025–26 or will that be reassessed?

[2.10 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: I can assure the member that we work constantly to attract and retain staff throughout the state, whether it is supporting our statewide services to support those areas with vacancies or other retention and attraction programs like our partnerships with universities. The attraction and retention of child protection staff is a key priority, like I said before. I work with the department on a weekly basis to drive down vacancies wherever possible because we know that the child protection workforce is a really critical part of any community to ensure that we keep children safe. It includes financial incentives like the ones I described previously and things like working with the university sector to develop a Bachelor of Social Work for Aboriginal employees. It is things like making sure that we have specialised calling qualification assessment frameworks and reviewing our processes to improve the current model. It is also about supporting existing staff through workplace violence and aggression programs to ensure that safety is in place for child protection staff, including trialling worker safety devices to improve incident responses and the workplace safety of our staff. It is an ongoing priority and I will not be satisfied until there are no vacancies in child protection.

Ms M. BEARD: Will part of the group of people the government is attracting to the regions be used to fill senior regional manager positions overseeing each of those locations?

Ms S.E. WINTON: My understanding is that the regional attraction and retention incentive applies to a range of roles within the child protection area. I might get Ben Whitehouse to provide a bit more detail.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, minister. The RARI fund does cover senior operational leaders within regions—those who operate and manage the frontline services.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Right at the bottom of page 524, reference is made to “Preventing and Responding to FDV” and Aboriginal family safety grants. Can the minister explain to me some detail about that grant program?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Thanks for the question. As the member would be aware, the government continues to focus on family and domestic violence, particularly for Aboriginal women. We know that they are disproportionately represented as victims of family and domestic violence. The member would know that the government established a taskforce that reported back to government with a system reform plan. As part of our commitment in accepting that system reform plan, the member would also know that some \$96.4 million of funding is in this year's state budget to specifically deliver on those system reforms. One of those areas, as the member highlighted, is some \$6.3 million for grants to Aboriginal organisations to submit their ideas for localised and place-based solutions for family and domestic violence. I am happy for Dr Nicole Leggett to provide a little bit more detail.

Dr N. Leggett: The minister is exactly right. The Aboriginal family safety grants program is for Aboriginal-registered businesses and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to essentially seek funding for local and place-based solutions to family safety. They can put forward submissions for any type of activity that is really on a continuum, from prevention and community-based prevention work through to response work. The grants that they can seek are for up to a two-year period, and the grants program was opened and released on Tenders WA on 13 May.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the \$3 million and the subsequent \$3 million for implementing initiatives or is it to administer this grant program about ideas that will be helpful in dealing with FDV?

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Ms S.E. WINTON: My advice is that \$6 million is to go to Aboriginal-controlled organisations and community groups to deliver place-based services to support Aboriginal woman and children impacted by family and domestic violence.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: For instance, the strategy calls for the likes of healing groups and healing spaces for men and women and on-country healing for boys and men to reset. Can the minister see those types of initiatives put in place within the next financial year? How long does the minister think some of those ideas could take to come into place and be effective on the ground?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I guess a really important part of this initiative is to listen to Aboriginal-led place-based solutions. That message was received loud and clear through the process of a taskforce. In that respect, it would be up to those Aboriginal-controlled organisations to put forward their initiatives of what they would like to see in their localised areas. I guess some of the things the member described could potentially be considered, but I will not pre-empt what the Aboriginal-led solutions would be. That would be inappropriate. We are seeking advice, suggestions and input from Aboriginal-controlled organisations to lead that work. Certainly, I would say Aboriginal women are over-represented in experiencing family and domestic violence, and there is always more to do, but this is the right step in getting Aboriginal people to come forward with the solutions they would like to see.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: For those Aboriginal organisations that the minister is referring to, is there a guideline as to the type of group? Can it be like a family group or must it be an organisation with an ABN? What types of groups can apply for these funding grants?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Dr Leggett to comment in a moment, but I would generally think that, through the tender process and the provision of government grants, it is appropriate that it is Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

The CHAIR: Dr Leggett. I have seen you, member for Vasse.

Dr N. Leggett: The minister is correct. It is Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, but also Aboriginal-registered businesses.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Are there any sorts of geographical restrictions on this or can it be someone from Esperance right through to Broome and right through the state?

Ms S.E. WINTON: No; it is statewide.

[2.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I just have a final one, if I can, madam chair.

The CHAIR: You said that last time, but fair enough.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The family safety strategy has called for long-term sustainable funding of programs that focus on family violence prevention and early intervention. I assume that this also fits within the guidelines, if you like, of the grant program.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Absolutely. I would also like to reinforce that many of the initiatives and investments we make in the area of family and domestic violence—whether through the budget process, the announcements we made in November or the \$420 million of investment since 2021—support Aboriginal women and children. I could give the member an example. When we talk about any of the investments we make in crisis accommodation, perpetrator responses or primary prevention, supporting Aboriginal families is a key part of all those investments.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have a response to the Aboriginal Family Legal Services, which called this funding a bandaid response to a pervasive health and welfare problem?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I would say that there is always more to do. I would also say that this response has been guided by sector partners, working closely with government to develop the system reform plan and the funding that was announced in this state budget. In that regard, I would again like to put on the record that non-government representatives did the hard slog of working on the taskforce. They represented not only voices across the state, but also a variety of service providers, whether they provide legal supports, financial supports or otherwise. We will continue to prioritise funding for the prevention of family and domestic violence. It is a scourge on our community right around the nation. Let us be clear: this \$96.4 million will not solve a complex issue that has been going on for many, many years. I will say that our funding is targeted. It is guided by sector experts in where they want us to direct particular funding, and we will continue to do that.

Ms L. METTAM: My question relates to page 506 and the significant issue in paragraph 10.7. What perpetrator programs are being introduced?

The CHAIR: It is at the bottom of page 506.

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Ms S.E. WINTON: Everyone would know that when we talk about investing in the prevention of family and domestic violence, our government's approach has been based on what I would describe as three key planks. One plank is the important work of crisis support or supporting victims at the point of need. Importantly, a key plank is also perpetrators and primary prevention. This budget also sees us continue the investments that we have made over a number of years in perpetrator programs because we know that we need to change the cycle so that men change their ways. An example in this year's budget is a \$4.5 million funding uplift for the men's behaviour change program, which is better known as Breathing Space, in Maylands and Calista. I had the privilege of visiting that centre—I think it was late last year—and I spent about an hour and a half speaking to perpetrators who were part of the residential program that works intensively with men to change their ways. It is important work, and we have ensured in this year's budget that that can continue. Of course, we are also supporting Breathing Space in South Hedland. As well as that, we have invested significantly to support perpetrator programs in the regions. There is \$3.1 million over two years for three men's behaviour change programs in Bunbury, Albany and Northam. Importantly, as part of our partnership with the commonwealth, we have been able to trial men's workers in FDV response teams, particularly in Northam, Bunbury, Joondalup, Fremantle and Midland. They are part of the response team that, importantly, works with victims but also has the opportunity to go in and work with perpetrators after there has been a police report. Their role is not to support perpetrators; it is really to hold them to account and demand that they participate in programs to change their behaviour.

Ms L. METTAM: Why is there no funding in this year's budget for additional GPS ankle bracelets for perpetrators?

The CHAIR: Member, did you not hear the earlier answer? It is the Attorney General's portfolio.

Ms L. METTAM: That was about the legislation; this is about the funding.

The CHAIR: No; it was about the funding as well. Next question!

Ms S.E. WINTON: If I can, I will just explain.

The CHAIR: You are canvassing my ruling, minister. That is very courageous of you.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I just wanted to make it clear. I would answer the question if I could, but it is not a line item in my portfolio.

The CHAIR: All right. The next question is for the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I spoke to the minister briefly earlier about the Early Years partnership, which is in paragraph 9 on page 506 of the *Budget statements*. Of course, the minister and I were both there when the minister launched this program in Katanning. What are the minister's major aspirations for this partnership? What will it do differently from what has happened in the past?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. I do remember; that was a fair while ago. I have been back to Katanning a few times since. The Early Years partnership is a really important piece of work that the government is doing in conjunction with not only the Minderoo Foundation, but also the Telethon Kids Institute. It is trying to do things a little bit differently, importantly, so we ensure that children aged from zero to four years are able to get the best start in life. The member would know that it is a collaboration between the Department of Communities, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and our non-government partners to try to do things differently. By doing things differently, I mean that four key communities have been identified as part of this program and they have been selected quite, I guess, strategically. One community is Katanning and its surrounds, which I think includes about eight local government areas. That is quite different from Armadale, another community group. Then we have Derby and two outlying communities, and the fourth location is Bidyadanga, which is about 300 kilometres from Broome. They were chosen quite strategically in the sense that they are very different communities and have very different needs. Also, they were chosen because the four areas had good leadership and good structures in place. The member would know that a fair bit of time has been spent at each of those locations, working with community and with families, to put together their own action plans for things the communities see as being important to invest in to allow the children to thrive. For example, in Katanning, one thing that was identified was family and domestic violence. That is quite different from Armadale, where they were talking about getting better support for child and maternal health checks. Somewhere like Bidyadanga, which is 300 kilometres out of Broome, is quite different from anywhere else. They said they needed more accommodation space so that visiting allied services could be accommodated to do important work with their community. Each of those four locations have put together their own action plan. In this year's budget, we have provisioned further money, with \$15.6 million from the government and, of course, an additional \$19 million from Minderoo Foundation, to now deliver on 24 key projects in those locations. They are very different in very different locations, but at the heart of all of them is support for families and children to thrive in their youngest years.

[2.30 pm]

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Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I understand that across the forward estimates, \$10.1 million of \$15.6 million has been allocated to communities. What is the contribution of the Telethon Kids Institute and Minderoo? Is it cash? Is it in kind?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will just ask about the Telethon Kids Institute, but Minderoo's is a \$19 million cash co-contribution with the state government's additional \$15.6 million. Collectively, that money will fund 24 key projects that have been identified in those four communities. One example is the construction of the early learning family centre in Derby. In Katanning in the great southern, which is the area the member is most interested in, it is for additional support for child dental health services, like I said, accommodation at Bidyadanga and more child and maternal health checks in Armadale. There are 24 discrete projects that will be funded out of that money.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How does the minister see its interaction with the Department of Education? Is it about identification of those students? How would that play out?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am not understanding the question.

The CHAIR: It is about the interaction of those projects with the education department.

Ms S.E. WINTON: There are 24 discrete projects and the vast majority are Department of Communities projects, but some discrete projects will be led by the Department of Education. That is why we will see them in its budget papers, although the Department of Communities is the lead. The important thing about this is that although the various funding streams might appear in different budgets—for example, the child and maternal health checks would sit in the health budget—there is a coordinating role and a community-led leadership group in each of those four places that come together. Representatives from each of the agencies and our partners are on the leadership groups in those communities.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to “Coercive Control Education and First Responder Training” on page 503 under “New Initiatives”. Why has coercive control legislation not been introduced as a priority of this government?

The CHAIR: Minister, is that your portfolio?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to answer a question about coercive control as it relates to my portfolio.

Coercive control is an insidious form of family and domestic violence. It is subtle and difficult to recognise. In fact, I would probably challenge everyone in the chamber that most of us would not even know what it looks like. I have certainly had the conversation with my three daughters and they do not know what it looks like or how to identify it. When we talk about legislation and coercive control, it is really important that we understand it. I am talking about women understanding it, the men who perpetrate it understanding it and also, importantly, the judiciary, police and all the other people who intersect with victims of domestic violence understanding what it looks like. Our approach is guided by the sector, which has clearly said that we need to have a phased approach to criminalising it to ensure that we have the systems in place to make it successful. That is why I am really pleased that this budget includes funding to ensure that that important work is undertaken. We have to get this right.

Ms L. METTAM: I understand the point that the minister makes about ensuring that people understand it before it is legislated, but what sort of timeframe are we looking at for legislation that will complement the education program?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Our government has made significant legislative changes throughout our term because we have prioritised keeping women and children safe and will continue to do that, but when we introduce legislation, we absolutely need to make sure that we get it right. We do not want unintended consequences. This investment is ensuring that we continue to do that important work around coercive control and that educating various sections of the community on coercive control occurs. That is what I am focused on. This year's budget investment shows our continued determination to do everything we can with legislation to keep women and children safe. We are not going to be rushed into something. We will take guidance from our sector partners in doing this important work, particularly, in the first instance, with the Department of Justice. We will continue to consult with experts on this.

Ms L. METTAM: Is this education within the context of the government's proposed coercive control legislation? Is the education about what the legislation will look like, or is it just about coercive control and raising the awareness of coercive control as an issue?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Dr Leggett to provide some more detail.

Dr N. Leggett: Thank you for the question. This initiative is about more general awareness raising about family and domestic violence and coercive control, which the legislation and then the implementation of the legislation will build on.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the targeted cohort for the coercive control education and training? How is the government getting that message out?

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Ms S.E. WINTON: The department is collaborating with the Department of Justice on this new program to identify the specific cohorts of professionals to be targeted—the member would appreciate there are many—and the scope of the training program and to utilise the existing training materials. It is anticipated the target procurement will be undertaken to identify a suitable provider to develop the training program.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to service 6 in the service summary table on page 509, “Care Arrangements and Support Services for Children in the CEO’s Care”. I can see that the 2023–24 budget amount was lower than what was provided and then it drops again to \$662 million in 2024–25. Can the minister identify what the reasons might be?

[2.40 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: The member and everyone in the chamber knows that our recommissioning process has led to a significant amount of reform in the out-of-home-care sector. Certainly, that has been a significant piece of work. Basically, the heart of the reform is to have more Aboriginal community-controlled organisations doing this important work with children in care so that we have greater stability and more options for not only children, but also their siblings to stay together. It will allow for better and earlier reunification and is a flexible approach. That transition process is a complex piece of work. As we transition children from the old system to the new system, in effect, we have two systems operating at the same time. I am happy for Ben to provide some detail on the quantum.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, minister. The minister is absolutely correct. The Department of Communities places 20 per cent of the children in the care of the department with community sector organisations. An element of the recommissioning process occurred last year, and the fundamental aims were to increase the number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations caring for Aboriginal children—so, placing Aboriginal children with family carers or ACCOs, as well as better targeting resources to children depending on their needs. If a child has highly complex needs, their care arrangement is resourced at a higher level than that for a child with less complex needs, so it is using a finite resource in the most effective way. The funding that the member referred to is essentially, as we transition, used to scale up new providers at the same time as scaling down old providers. So there is an element of funding two systems as we assertively transition children from previous providers to new providers.

Ms M. BEARD: Is the minister saying that the reduction in this line item has been moved somewhere else, so the service levels have not reduced? The reduction in money does not mean a reduction in the services being offered?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Mr Mike Rowe to elaborate.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much. I would see it more as a really significant uplift in investment in really vulnerable children who need it. As the minister and Mr Whitehouse have explained, it is not just about transitioning from an old system to a new system. The new system is fundamentally different and better because it is more bespoke to the complex requirements of individual children. As both the minister and Mr Whitehouse said earlier, the new system is much more geared towards better placements for Aboriginal children with Aboriginal carers and ultimately with Aboriginal families, but it also has some new types of care that we have not previously had in the system. Temporary care homes have been set up across the state, so the funding includes the purchasing and set-up of those new homes. That gives us a bit more capacity in the system for emergency placements. The system is a lot more sophisticated than we have had in the past. It is the result of 10 years of engagement with the sector over what a better system would look like. It is a pretty significant moment for our agency, and it is a very significant commissioning process. We are in the middle of transitioning those children into the new arrangement. Fundamentally, it is a better arrangement for children in care.

Ms M. BEARD: Is the minister able to tell me how many children are in the old system and how many have been transitioned to the new system?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I just want to make the point that this out-of-home-care reform relates to 1 000 children in total, and, of those, I am advised that some 80 per cent have already been transitioned over, which is a significant achievement given the complexities involved.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I refer to page 504 of budget paper No 2, under spending changes and new initiatives, and the second line item on that page, “Flexible Support Package”. Could the minister explain what the flexible support package is and how it will provide tailored assistance to victim-survivors, please?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for Mirrabooka for her question and for her advocacy for victims of family and domestic violence. She has some incredible people working in her patch day in, day out to support women and children.

The flexible support package is a really important piece of funding. It is individualised funding that allows victim-survivors to overcome practical barriers. Practical barriers are very different for different women; for example, a woman may have entered a refuge and needs repairs to her car to maintain employment or get her child to school. In other instances, it might be that the woman needs support to get her driver’s licence in the first place. Some

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women from regional areas may not feel safe living in a refuge in a small town where the perpetrator resides, so the flexible support might be travel costs to relocate. The package allows us to tailor supports to the needs of individual women. The evaluation of the previous flexible support funding program identified that over 4 000 women had been receiving assistance through that program. The 34 organisations that are in receipt of this funding have overwhelmingly given positive feedback on the program and the flexibility it gives them in their capacity to assist women. Certainly, each time I have gone to a refuge or visited support services that help women, they talk particularly about the importance of this funding stream that allows them to support women and children with their needs. It is a really important part of this year's budget.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 503 and the line item “FDV Taskforce—Strengthen Responses”. One issue that came up with the Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce was emergency service or police response times. I am talking specifically about the late Lynn Cannon, whose sister called for a more urgent response to calls involving the risk of family and domestic violence. In that case, Lynn was threatened that day. Her murderer was armed with a weapon.

The CHAIR: I suspect the minister is familiar with that case, for brevity's sake.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. Is the taskforce doing any work in response to that particular issue?

The CHAIR: That is the police portfolio, but if you are able to answer it, minister, do. If you are not, do not.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes. I am not going to be able to talk about police response times. Clearly, that is not in my portfolio, but I will say that one of the key things that the taskforce highlighted to us was the FDV response teams, which are a co-location, really, of the important people who support victim-survivors. There are 17 family and domestic violence response teams around the state, with eight in the regions, and police, child protection staff and community service sector advocates are co-located together. They do that important work post police call-outs to assess those incidents and ensure that supports are put in place to support victim-survivors in the days and weeks that follow. The member will note a significant uplift for those teams in this year's budget of some \$53.8 million. We know FDV does not happen nine to five; it is something that happens seven days a week, so it is really important that we provide support to those teams to be able to operate seven days a week. Importantly, part of that \$58.3 million will enable more people to join those teams, including corrective services staff, family support officers and the like. I have had the chance to visit, I think, three of those places. The work they do is critically important in not only assessing the incidents that police have gone out to, but also triaging them and making sure that the support services go out there to ensure that those women and children are safe.

[2.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: As part of the role of the family and domestic violence support teams and in response to alarm that has been raised, has any work been done to better inform those first responders when a 000 call is made, given that, in some instances, it is the first port of call?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Dr Leggett just reminded me that I went to visit them. Part of our election commitment in 2021 was to support the training of first responders, including members of St John Ambulance, to assess the 000 calls that the member is talking about and to understand when FDV is present. I had the privilege to go out and meet them. That was a key part of what the taskforce was telling us. One of the four key pillars of the taskforce was around workforce development not just in the key areas—that is, first responders or people in the sector who support victim-survivors—but also more broadly, in everyone's workplace.

Ms L. METTAM: I understand that it was a 2021 commitment. Is that funding in place and is training, informed by the issues that have been raised by people such as Lynn Cannon's family, currently happening?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Dr Leggett to explain.

Dr N. Leggett: The initiative that the minister referred to is funding that is provided to St John. It is an ongoing initiative. That funding is used to train its paid paramedics, volunteers and 000 call takers to be able to be better placed to identify and respond to family and domestic violence when taking calls, at the scene or when providing ambulance services or whatever it might be.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: I know where you are going to go with this one, member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: Have the significant concerns that have been raised by Lynn's family better informed the training that is happening?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am not sure whether the training of first responders at St John can be connected with the training of police. I think that might be a question for the Minister for Police. I seek your guidance, chair.

The CHAIR: That is why I thought there were some issues with it, minister. The member for Roe with a new question.

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Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 136 of budget paper No 3 and the investment in child protection services, where it states —

- \$46.3 million to expand the Home Stretch WA program to meet increased demand for placements across metropolitan and regional areas and cover ongoing program administration costs;

What was the expected initial level of demand for this service?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Home Stretch is a really important flagship program that was first introduced under the McGowan government and is being continued through a further investment in this budget. This program backs in young people in the out-of-home-care system and acknowledges that we are not going to stop supporting them when they turn 18. We know that the age of 18 is a challenging time in life, particularly for those who have not had the best start in life. Home Stretch is important in making sure that we back them in and keep those supports going. There can be a range of support. In the first instance, if their care arrangement is such that the family wants to continue supporting them, we are able to continue to support them financially through Home Stretch to continue that arrangement with that young person. Additionally, they can be supported in finishing school, with career planning and with their various housing options. It is a really important program that backs in young people. Initially, the state government funded the program with some \$37.2 million. My understanding is that some 330 young people have been supported. This further investment of \$46.3 million will allow us to expand that service and ensure that any young person, wherever they live in the state, will be able to be supported through this critically important program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the actual demand for this service?

Ms S.E. WINTON: We have had high interest in the program. Some 70 per cent of children in care have opted into the program, with 95 per cent of participants retained in the program. In terms of providing a bit of scale and context to it, approximately 300 young people exit the care system in any one year. This investment will allow us to support them, no matter where they live.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a commensurate increase in both metropolitan and regional areas? Is the minister able to advise the breakdown of numbers in both those areas?

[3.00 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: As part of our 2021 election commitment, we fully rolled out the program across the state, which has seen grant agreements with nine Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and three community service organisations to support its delivery. I want to be clear that all young people who leave care will be able to access it no matter where they live.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have any sort of breakdown of regional and metro numbers?

Ms S.E. WINTON: It is a voluntary program and I am advised that, up until this point, it is about 90 per cent of young people leaving care in the metropolitan area and around 60 per cent of regional young people. That is not because the services are not there. That is just the young people who are choosing to participate in the program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Budget paper No 3 refers to the funding covering ongoing administration costs. Does the minister have a rundown of the administration costs?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Mr Whitehouse to give the member that detail.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, member. There are three FTE associated with the administration. That relates to paying the Staying On subsidy or the housing allowance, for which Communities has paid out about \$1.3 million to children who are staying on with their carers or transitioning to housing. There is also the ongoing program management, contract management and implementation.

Dr K. STRATTON: I refer to page 504 of budget paper No 2 and the ongoing initiatives listed under the spending changes. There is a line item for foster and family carer support services. Could the minister tell us what supports are being offered to Western Australia's foster and family carers to ensure that they can continue to support vulnerable young people in our communities?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for Nedlands for the question. I want to acknowledge not only her advocacy while she has been a member of Parliament, but also her previous life as a social worker. It is really great to have her as a parliamentary colleague with her expertise. Before I talk about some of the support services, of course, Home Stretch, by extension, is also providing supports for foster carers to encourage them and to financially support them to keep supporting young people. We know the cost of living is challenging for everyone and we do not want financial challenges to be a reason for foster carers not being able to support a young person. Keeping those relationships going is a really important part of Home Stretch.

As the minister, one of my key priorities has been to recognise the important work that foster carers do, to celebrate them and to appreciate the role they play. Of course, we can always do with more foster carers. It is really important

that we continue the work of promoting the important difference that can be made in someone's life by foster carers opening their hearts and homes to a young child or an older child in need. We need to keep recruiting new foster carers, but we also absolutely need to keep supporting our existing foster carers so that they can continue to do their important work with vulnerable children. In 2023, we launched *Who can say OK in WA?* to assist foster and family carers to feel confident and supported in making decisions for children and young people in care. It is not easy to be a parent and it is much harder caring for another's child. I cannot imagine how difficult it is to make those decisions sometimes. It is important to provide supports for that important work. In 2023, we launched the "Become a foster carer: Make a difference to a child's life" campaign. I am happy that it has more than doubled the application numbers from the year prior. We are starting to see people contemplating making a contribution by supporting a vulnerable person in their homes.

In January 2024, we made the cost-of-living announcement for a one-off payment to not only foster carers and family carers, but also, importantly—I know it is an area the member for Nedlands is particularly interested in—grandcarers. We provided \$500 for the first child in care and \$250 for each additional child. There was a great uptake of that. Some 5 000 families benefited from that cost-of-living support, particularly at the beginning of the school year when it can be really challenging to budget for all the extra costs. The 5 000 households that benefited from the payment equate to supporting 8 000 children and young people. The 2024–25 budget continues to invest in foster and family carers with \$17 million in funding for support services like carer advocacy information and support, with an annual \$273 000 top-up to the existing recurrent budget of \$910 000. OurSPACE WA is so important to the continuation and expansion of services in community sector organisations, including Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, which until now were not eligible to receive counselling support.

It is really important that we support our foster carers so they can be the best supports for vulnerable children. The funding in this year's budget is also for family support services so we can maintain the current service delivery to provide in-home practical support for carers across the state. That could be things like providing information on how adverse childhood experiences affect children and how to support them. It is very important to remember that many young people come to foster families with trauma and we need to be able to support those foster families to understand that trauma and how to support young people. We need to make sure that we build strong support networks and links to the community. We also need to assist foster carers in supporting a child's ongoing connection to their birth parents and culture. I think foster carers, family carers and grandcarers are the true angels in our community. I think sometimes people have a stereotypical view of what a foster carer looks like. We have many foster carers who take on different roles, whether it is emergency relief or respite relief. There are lots of different ways people can make contributions as foster carers. The stereotypical notion that they take on responsibility for a child from birth to 18 years is not the case for all foster carers. There are many ways people can contemplate supporting our vulnerable children and young people.

[3.10 pm]

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 137 of budget paper No 3. The notation at the top of the page states that \$17 million has been allocated to support the continuation and expansion of foster care supports across the state. How much of that \$17 million relates to the expansion of foster carer supports? Is it new money in addition to what they already receive, or does it partly exist?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said during my answer to the member for Nedlands' question, the \$17 million reflects additional funding so the department can continue to deliver the foster and family carer support services, which includes things such as carer advocacy and information support, to give that top-up of \$273 000 to the existing \$910 000 recurrent spend a year. That will enable OurSPACE to fund the continuation and expansion of those services to continue work in the community with foster carers and the family carer support service to maintain current service delivery. It is a whole range of things. I will ask Mr Whitehouse to elaborate on what that \$17 million looks like and how it will support our foster carers.

Mr B. Whitehouse: These vital and important services for carers were implemented as a result of the Foster Care Refresh reform after consulting with hundreds of carers across the state about what is working, what is not working and what we can improve. These things have been tested over the years since 2021 and were evaluated last year. The evaluation showed that they were very effective, particularly the elements of emotional and practical support and skill support for carers in being able to sustain care arrangements, particularly family care arrangements. One of the recommendations or learnings is around the importance of advocacy for foster carers. That has been provided with several extra FTE for independent advocacy for foster carers when they might need support that is independent of the department or a community service organisation. The other growth is from OurSPACE, which is a counselling and practical support for what was initially just Department of Communities carers and general foster carers. That has grown as a result of this year's budget into the 20 per cent of children who are living in community sector organisations or approved care organisation arrangements.

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Ms M. BEARD: Is the minister able to advise how many children are in foster care at the moment and how many families are currently approved as foster carers?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I can advise that as of 21 May, 5 319 children were in care and the number of households with foster family and special guardianship orders is 3 263.

Ms M. BEARD: Are there any foster children whose whereabouts are currently unknown by the department?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As of 21 May, two young people were unaccounted for—in contact; five young people were unaccounted for—not in contact; and one young person was missing. I would like to make a couple of additional comments in that regard. As I said, the total number of kids in care is 5 300. It is always a very tiny percentage of young people who are unaccounted for at any one point in time.

Ms M. BEARD: How long has the young person been missing for?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As of 21 May, the one young person had been missing for five days.

Ms M. BEARD: Have there been any complaints of abuse against foster carers? Have any incidents been reported in which children in foster care have suffered abuse?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Is that a new question?

The CHAIR: I think it is.

Ms M. BEARD: It is in relation to foster carers.

The CHAIR: Minister, I think you can deal with it.

Ms S.E. WINTON: So, is it back to foster carers?

The CHAIR: Yes. We could make it a new question.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Is it a fresh question on foster carers, chair?

The CHAIR: It is a further question, but because the initial question was quite generic, I think we can fit it under that.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Okay. I want to clarify that. In answering the question, I do not want to make an implication that there is some sort of abuse occurring around the statistics for unaccounted children.

The CHAIR: I think it is separate in that context.

Ms S.E. WINTON: From time to time there will be allegations. The department takes such allegations seriously and they would be fully investigated. Certainly, I urge anyone to come forward if they have specific allegations. I might ask the director general to explain the procedure when that does occur.

Mr M. Rowe: The first comment I would make is that we do everything we possibly can to make sure that children in care are in a safe placement. The vast majority of children are in placements with family but, regardless, we make sure that carers have a working with children check, and that is a pretty exhaustive process. We put general foster carers through a pretty exhaustive process to make sure that it will be safe for children. Obviously, community service organisation staff and associated carers go through a similar rigorous process. My first point is that we try everything possible to make sure that children go into a safe place in the first instance. As the minister said, if there are allegations, we take them very seriously. Depending on the nature of the allegation, we may take immediate action to remove children from a placement, but all allegations are investigated and, depending on their nature, they may also be referred to the police.

Ms M. BEARD: Of those foster carers, how many have been relieved of their duties for whatever reason?

The CHAIR: That is a bit general. In one context, the member is talking about abuse and then, more generally, the member is talking about foster carers being relieved. The member needs to be more specific. Just to make it specific, the member wants to know about allegations of abuse, not more generally—for example, removal for ill-health reasons or other things.

[3.20 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: Okay. Can I ask the member to repeat the question?

Ms M. BEARD: I would like to know how many carers, if any, have been relieved of foster care duties as a result of abuse or —

The CHAIR: Allegations.

Ms M. BEARD: — unworkable circumstances.

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Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, I think there are 3 000-odd foster carers in the system at any one point. For a variety of reasons, some of them choose not to continue to be foster carers. I am not sure whether I have that specific information available for the member.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to significant issue 10, “Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence”, on page 506 of budget paper No 2. How many times has the Family and Domestic Violence Taskforce met since its inception in September 2023?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The member would know that the taskforce was set up by the government in September and concluded recently with the system reform plan, which was adopted by the government and is being supported through the state budget to the tune of \$96.4 million. I am advised that the taskforce met on six occasions. A number of meetings, workshops and consultations were held outside of the six meetings of the taskforce proper, so to speak.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm how many times the taskforce has met? Are the minutes of those meetings publicly available?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said in my previous answer, the taskforce met six times and conducted numerous consultations and workshops outside of those six meeting times. The work of the taskforce has now concluded, with its system reform plan being endorsed by the government. It has committed to implement the plan, which is publicly available.

Ms L. METTAM: Have any recommendations been made by the taskforce that have not been adopted by the government?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am advised that the answer is no; all the agreed actions are in the system reform plan.

Ms L. METTAM: I understand that at the summit, which I believe triggered the taskforce, there was a discussion about a specialist police unit.

The CHAIR: You are getting a bit away from it.

Ms L. METTAM: It was a recommendation, which I thought was going to be part of the taskforce. Where did that fit in?

The CHAIR: I think it fits into another portfolio, but the minister may be able to answer it.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Dr Leggett to elaborate a bit more. The summit talks about what the member might remember and what some people described as a one-page ask of things that the sector was looking for. Two of the key asks were to establish a taskforce, which the Premier agreed to. It resulted in the leaders of agencies, all the directors general, the Under Treasurer and the Commissioner of Police fully participating in the taskforce and the development of this system reform plan.

Another key ask of the taskforce was the establishment of a lived experience entity, which we have also committed to through \$1.9 million of funding to ensure that we move ahead with that. The taskforce’s deliberations fully considered everything that was discussed at the summit, which is reflected in the system reform plan that was endorsed by all members of the taskforce. As I said, it has now been endorsed by the government, as reflected by the \$96 million investment to move forward and ensure that the system reform plan is put in place.

Ms L. METTAM: Was “Lynn’s Law” considered by the taskforce?

The CHAIR: Minister, you can judge better whether that relates to budget items.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to comment on this because I am very happy to say that yes, the taskforce did consider a disclosure scheme as part of the system reform plan, which is publicly available and might be of some interest to the member opposite.

Apologies, Chair, I got my Lyns confused. I understand that the member opposite was referring to police response times.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, in relation to family and domestic violence.

The CHAIR: All right. Well, we cannot go there. This is the wrong portfolio. In fact, I chaired part of those portfolios. No-one bothered to ask about that.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer the minister to the line item “Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services” under the service summary on page 509 of budget paper No 2. Given the over-representation of Aboriginal families in out-of-home care, can the minister give us some information on how the Cook government is supporting more Aboriginal families to stay together?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. He is right; Aboriginal children are over-represented in the out-of-home care system. Our government will continue to invest to ensure that we do better. We prioritise keeping children safe at home because we know that children thrive at home with their families and a cultural

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connection. Through our focus on out-of-home care recommissioning, which will see six Aboriginal-controlled organisations doing important work to ensure cultural connection for young kids in care and to support reunification, we will continue to invest in earlier intervention and family support services because we do not want young kids coming into care in the first place.

Since 2017, we have supported more families to stay together and for children to be reunified and return home safely. Our strategy provides culturally responsive earlier targeted intervention and prioritises at-risk Aboriginal families to reduce that over-representation I spoke of.

Communities, in partnership with a range of community service sector partners, delivers some of these EIFS services, including the family support networks and the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service, which is a culturally responsive intensive in-home support program delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. When we think about it, it is about going in and supporting families to ensure that children are safe so that decisions do not have to be made to remove children. We know that it is having great results, along with the regional service model—a newly implemented service developed for locations in the East Kimberley, the Pilbara and the south west—and of course the intensive family support services. Under our strategy, 85 per cent of children who were referred to that Aboriginal in-home support service in particular have remained safely at home after 12 months and about 80 per cent of those who were referred to the intensive family support service remained safely at home after 12 months. We know that early intervention is the key. If it were not for those early interventions, it might have been a very different outcome for those young children. We will continue to invest in programs and initiatives that support families and children staying together.

In this year's budget is \$5.8 million for the continuation of the Aboriginal family-led decision-making pilot and what is known as AROs—Aboriginal responsible organisations. In regard to the Aboriginal family-led decision-making program, I have seen Streeties, which is a great Aboriginal community-controlled organisation in Geraldton, work with families and children to ensure that they understand and are supported in how they can make their homes safer for their children and divert children from having to go into care. The ARO is an important program, but the focus is slightly different whereby when a decision is made that a child has to go into care, the ARO does important work so that the placements are culturally sensitive and the ARO supports the family to ensure that the places the children or young people are put in are culturally responsive and that the families support our young people. We know that if we keep kids connected with their families, we will have a much better chance of reunification, ultimately, down the line.

The budget also has a two-year extension—I am really happy about that, and I know that the Attorney General is too—to fund Dandjoo Bidi-Ak, which is the therapeutic family court. I have made a couple of visits there. The work that the people in that space are doing to improve outcomes for Aboriginal families involved in court proceedings is quite extraordinary. I am really pleased to see funding in this year's budget to continue that work. Early intervention is the key, and early intervention through Aboriginal-led responses is absolutely key to ensuring that we keep young children out of care and that they remain connected and safe with family.

[3.35 pm]

The CHAIR: I might indicate that there will be a changing of the guard in the chair at four o'clock so we might schedule a small comfort break then. Would that suit you, minister?

Ms S.E. WINTON: That is fine.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to the service summary on page 509 of budget paper No 2. Line item 5 is "Child Protection Assessments and Investigations". I am wondering about the discrepancy between the actual expenditure and the increase in the budgeted amount for the assessments. What is the reason for that?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Can the member repeat the question?

Ms M. BEARD: I am wondering about the variance in the budgeted amount of \$99 857 000 for 2023–24 and the estimated actual amount that jumped to \$103 040 000 in 2023–24. It then jumps to \$111 309 000 in 2024–25. What is the reason behind those discrepancies?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will ask Mr Wayne Millen to provide some detail.

Mr W. Millen: The movement that the member refers to is primarily attributed to the net impact of several items. There is an overhead allocation whereby the overall overhead costs of the entire agency are allocated across our services. Some of the contributors to that include that a non-government human services sector indexation uplift was applied. There was also an uplift provided for our lease costs for the Government Regional Officers' Housing and there were variations to government office accommodation leases. Additional funding was provided for those things that are allocated across our services. A general consumer price index increase was also applied as part of an annual cost-and-demand update that is provided to us by government.

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Ms M. BEARD: Does that include the caseworker FTEs?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to provide an answer, but I am advised that Mr Millen will need a bit more time. I am happy to come back to that if the member wants to ask another one.

The CHAIR: Is this a new question or a further question? Is it still on this line item?

Ms M. BEARD: Yes. It follows on from my caseworker question.

Assuming that the caseworkers are included in this amount and there is a shortfall, which the minister was explaining to us before, will there be an increase in this amount due to the fact that more caseworkers will be needed to come on board?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Thank you for your patience. I am advised that in the 2023–24 budget an additional \$106 million was allocated to child protection services over the period 2022–23 to 2026–27. The \$2.3 million uplift in 2024–25 is anticipated to support an additional 23 FTE.

Ms M. BEARD: If there will be an additional 23 FTE, can the minister advise me what the ratio of caseworkers to children needs to be? How many children can each caseworker have?

[3.40 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: More specifically, I think the member is trying to ask how many cases for each FTE. Broadly speaking, I will provide some generic information about child protection staff caseloads, which is guided by and in accordance with the 2007 Western Australia Industrial Relations Commission order. In that respect, caseloads in WA over the past 12 months have predominantly remained within the agreed limits set out in the industrial relations order. My understanding is that it is a limit of 15 cases.

Ms M. BEARD: Are there currently any caseworkers who have a load over and above 15 cases?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The data provided to me, which is relevant for 5 May, is that the statewide average case load is 10.85.

Ms M. BEARD: Am I hearing that no-one has more than 15 cases at the moment?

Ms S.E. WINTON: No. In some circumstances, there are caseworkers with more than 15 cases because the average is 10.85. There are currently no caseworkers with more than 18 cases, which is the upper limit for senior workers. There are 130 caseworkers with more than 15 cases, which is within the limit and allowable because they are senior caseworkers.

Ms M. BEARD: Sorry, what was that?

Ms S.E. WINTON: It is 113 caseworkers.

The CHAIR: Is it 113 or 130?

Ms S.E. WINTON: It is 113.

Ms M. BEARD: Just so that I understand, are there 113 caseworkers who have between 15 and 18 cases under their care?

Ms S.E. WINTON: That is correct.

Ms L. METTAM: For the children in care who have caseworkers, how many have had more than one caseworker?

The CHAIR: That is going to be difficult to answer, minister, is it not?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes. I am not sure I can answer that individually, but I will seek some advice in a moment, chair. I would say, as I have previously stated, in an ideal world, we would love for one caseworker to be with each individual child for their entire journey through the out-of-home care system. It is like many parents who want the same teacher for the entire year that their child is in the classroom. However, there are a number of circumstances as to why that is not the case. Child protection staff transfer, move, or leave the system. In some instances, it is the children and families who move, and it is a necessity that the caseworker changes. There are a bunch of variables outside of our control.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister providing an answer?

The CHAIR: The minister said it was difficult to do, and she is unable to do it because the factors were —

Ms L. METTAM: I thought she was referring —

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said before, there are a variety of reasons why there might be more than one caseworker in a child's or young person's out-of-home care journey. It varies. Broadly, we are talking about some 5 300 children in care, and I am not able to reasonably provide that information.

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The CHAIR: I am sorry. My intervention might have been unhelpful. I think the question is: are there records for the number of kids who have changed child protection workers?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Of course there are records. Each individual child or young person in care has a significant database of records of their journey in the out-of-home care system. That data is not aggregated and is not able to be collated in an efficient way to answer the kind of question that is being posed to me.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide that information via supplementary information?

The CHAIR: She just said no. It is not readily accessible to be collated. That was the answer. I think that means no.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: With reference to that answer, is that not something that the department and minister would be interested in to understand whether there is high turnover of caseworkers, or children who have had a significant number of caseworkers, outside some of those variables? I think that kind of assessment has not just been pulled out of our back pocket; it gets raised regularly with every member of Parliament that it is sometimes a revolving door. I would think the minister would want to be able to assess that to see whether there are issues that could be addressed as a result of understanding that data.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Like I said previously, in a perfect world, there would be one caseworker for the entirety of a young person's life. As I have previously said in this place, and outside, a whole range of reasons and factors contribute to changing a young person's caseworker. Notwithstanding that, I appreciate the comment the member is trying to make. It is of interest to the department and it is managed at the district level. All I am suggesting is that, from my perspective, it is unreasonable to ask the Department of Communities to try to aggregate that information across some 5 300 children in care to provide that level of detail.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I have a new question. I refer to page 504 under spending changes and ongoing initiatives. About two-thirds down the page is the line item "Community Gardens Grants Program". Can the minister provide some additional information about the community gardens grants program and detail some of the projects that will benefit from this investment?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for Mirrabooka for the question. I am sure everyone would agree that community gardens are a really cool thing in our community. They really do bring people together. It has been quite interesting when I travel across the state to see the different approaches communities have to community gardens. I recently visited a garden in the member for Scarborough's electorate. The kinds of people who were interested in participating in that garden included a lot who had downsized and did not have a traditional garden but still wanted to be part of that experience. When I have visited Albany or other places, it is a different cohort of people who value community gardens. What we know is that the gardens keep people together, engaged and active.

The member would also know that we provide grants of up to \$10 000 to establish or develop those community gardens around the state. They are very often overly subscribed because many great local communities want to establish community gardens or keep building on what they have already established in their community. In May, we announced that an additional investment of \$300 000-odd would be allocated to allow an additional 35 community garden projects to receive funding. That is on top of the 29 organisations that received their funding through the normal grants process in December 2023. In that regard, it brings the total number of community gardens that have received funding in 2023–24 to 64. They are available to incorporated not-for-profit community organisations as well as local community authorities. A couple of examples: there was \$10 000 for Alzheimer's WA to develop Don's Cottage Community Garden in Albany, which will provide social engagement and activity for people living with dementia and their carers; \$10 000 to establish a Vasse community garden as a central hub for the community; and \$8 800 for the Bremer Bay Community Resource and Visitors Centre to establish a community garden. As I said, I was recently at the coastal community garden in North Beach, and it has great plans for the plot of land that it has been allocated by the City of Stirling. It is well located between the footy ovals and the tennis courts. I can really see that this money will support it to bring its aspirations to reality. There will be a new round of this funding later on in the year, and I hope that others will also seek this funding to support them in the important work they do in communities. Sometimes, they are growing some really bizarre and strange things. When I was with the member for Darling Range in Baldivis, they were growing pigface, which is actually edible. I played with it as a child, but I had never eaten it before that visit. It is quite nice.

[3.50 pm]

The CHAIR: Gosh! That is a fun fact.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to paragraphs 10.4 to 10.7 on the bottom third of page 506, under the heading "Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence". Paragraph 10.4 notes "new refuge beds". I know that the minister knows that this is one of my pet questions. Will more or additional infrastructure be provided, particularly across the regions, not only for women's refuges but also for men's refuges? That is a growing area. I have talked to a few men on the street

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who have said, “If I could have got out, I would have left and gone to a men’s refuge.” That is obviously going to help quell the situation. Also, some children are, maybe for two or three nights in a row, continually wandering around. My question about those refuge beds is whether that is something that will be looked at.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. She is right: crisis refuge support is a critical and really important part of keeping women and children safe. I acknowledge her comments about men having a safe place to go to as well, specifically when we are talking about men being not the victims of family and domestic violence but the perpetrators and wanting to try to break the cycle and move somewhere else. The Breathing Space investments in Maylands, Calista and South Hedland are residential programs that allow men to get that support. They not only get somewhere to stay but also can participate in a nationally recognised, innovative program that supports perpetrators to change their ways. This government has made significant investments in crisis support since coming to government in 2017. We now fund 44 refuges and safe houses right across WA, with half of them based in the regions. Since 2017, we have had a 27 per cent uplift in WA, from 224 units to 284 units available. Of course, part of the \$160 million or so that we announced since November last year is a significant further investment in increasing that capacity, which will see an additional 72 units brought into the system. Part of that, of course, was rebuilding and tripling the size of the Stirling Women’s Centre, providing operational funding for Ruah Community Services’ new refuge in central Perth and extending the funding to Munda Mia Therapeutic Community.

Ms M. BEARD: Obviously, the minister is very aware of the patch I live in. I know that Broome has something in train for that area. Meekatharra, Mt Magnet and all those areas are strongly affected by this. Are there any refuges of any description in the pipeline in any of those spaces, including a men’s refuge in Carnarvon? I know the women’s refuge in Carnarvon is already full. Are there any plans to grow that in the near future?

Ms S.E. WINTON: For our investment in family and domestic violence, I will acknowledge that there is always more to do. There is always more to do, and we will continue our record investment in family and domestic violence. We have made an investment in crisis accommodation, as I described, and we also want to focus on and have invested in expanding the rapid rehousing program, which supports women out of crisis accommodation and into transitional housing. Also in this budget, we are focused on ensuring that we expand the Safe at Home program, which is being rolled out in many locations throughout the state, including at Kununurra, Port Hedland and Kalgoorlie. It already operates in Perth, the wheatbelt, the south west, Katanning and Fitzroy Crossing. When we talk about the whole suite of investments that we are making in family and domestic violence, we do not want women and children to leave their homes in the first place if it is safe to stay. We need to do everything we can to stop the violence in the first place, so, if possible, women and children stay home, where they deserve to be.

Ms M. BEARD: To keep them safe in their own homes, are liquor-free homes used regularly? In some towns I go to, the house is alcohol free, so if the partner or the perpetrator comes back and any alcohol is involved, they are not allowed in the house. The police can come and pick them up. Is the government using that tool for some of these safe spaces?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think liquor might be in somebody else’s portfolio. I seek the chair’s guidance.

The CHAIR: I would have thought there might be an interface between justice and maybe police. It would be a condition of bail or whatever.

Ms L. METTAM: In terms of emergency responses, I understand overwhelmingly —

The CHAIR: Is this the same line item? We are looking at new refuge beds. That is how we started.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. Do men have any participation at all in these services or are they dedicated women’s services?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The ones I mentioned are dedicated women’s and children’s services. As I said, also, when we talk about the perpetrator programs that I mentioned in answers to previous questions and to this one, the critical element is that they are residential programs that not only provide accommodation but also engage men in behaviour change programs, which we know are successful.

The CHAIR: I indicated that we might have a comfort break, so we will have a short break now.

Meeting suspended from 4.00 to 4.12 pm

[Mr S.J. Price took the chair.]

Ms L. METTAM: On page 506, paragraph 10.7 refers to the perpetrator programs. How many men are involved in the perpetrator programs at this time?

The CHAIR: Minister.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Welcome to the division, chair.

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As I said previously, perpetrator responses are a really important part of this government's response to family and domestic violence, because we need to stop the violence before it begins. A really critical part of that work is having programs that can challenge perpetrators and demand change of them. Various services that I described are being funded in this year's budget. That includes the Breathing Space facilities in South Hedland, Calista and Maylands as well as the behaviour change programs that have been announced in Bunbury, Albany and Northam. It depends on the kind of services that are being offered by the various programs. In that regard, I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide a little more detail.

Dr N. Leggett: In Western Australia, funded through the Department of Communities we have three Breathing Space programs. They operate with up to 12 rooms each. On any given night, 12 men per program can be accommodated in those Breathing Space programs. We fund five community-based men's behaviour change programs. They run group-based interventions. Any one group can have up to 12 men in it, and they may run multiple groups in a week. We also have individual men's workers attached to the family and domestic violence response teams in five locations. They provide intervention to a much larger number of men, because it is more one-to-one work following a police call-out. We also have Safe at Home perpetrator response, which also has a higher volume of response on a one-to-one basis, and we operate the Men's Domestic Violence Helpline, which takes calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That is our existing base of programs. It does not include the new funding, which the minister has spoken about, for the three new regional community-based programs that are to come online later this year.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the Men's Domestic Violence Helpline for perpetrators?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry; I do not understand the question.

Ms L. METTAM: The adviser referred to a family and domestic violence line for men.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry; it is line as in telephone line. I thought the member meant a line in the budget.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, I can understand that! Is that correct?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: How long has that helpline been going for, and what is the take-up or rate of usage? Can the minister give me an understanding of how often it is used?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am advised that that helpline has been operating since the late 1990s and supports men who reach out who want support in changing their behaviour. I am advised that we do not have information readily available on the number of people who use that helpline.

Ms L. METTAM: Is that information recorded? Would the department be able to provide that information by way of supplementary information?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The information is not available to me right now. Can I get back to the member when I have the information?

Ms L. METTAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Is that an informal arrangement?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes; I would like to see the information first.

Ms L. METTAM: How many perpetrators have been engaged in the Breathing Space program over the last financial year?

[4.20 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: As Dr Leggett said before, up to 12 men live in residential care as part of the perpetrator behaviour program at any given time. I do not have the figures in front of me in terms of the overall number of men who have been supported in the program. That would vary. Having spent time at the Maylands Breathing Space location, I know that some men stay for a limited period, some self-select to disengage from the program and others stay for longer periods. One man I spoke to was there for the second time. I do not have that information, but I can say that up to 12 men can be accommodated in each of these locations.

Ms L. METTAM: Is this information recorded; and, if so, is the minister able to provide it by way of supplementary information?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, those records are kept but I do not have them on me at the moment. I am happy for the member to put the question on notice and we will get the information to her.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister give me an indication of what the demand has been like for Breathing Space?

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The CHAIR: Member, you are drifting away from budget-related questions. You have a bit of latitude as the minister seems happy to respond.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I have previously indicated, there is demand and a need for perpetrator programs of all descriptions right throughout the state. The program at these three sites is very successful. That is why I am really happy that there has been an uplift to these services to ensure they can keep operating and supporting men in the important work of changing their behaviour.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to child protection and family support on page 524 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. The second-last item under that heading is Target 120. Funding for that is increasing in 2024–25 but then it seems that the program will suddenly come to an end in 2025–26. Can the minister confirm whether that is the case?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As members would know, Target 120 is a critical program that has at its heart a focus on intervening early to support young people and direct them away from future engagement with the justice system. We know that it is working. The original investment was an election commitment. The program has now been rolled out to 20 locations around the state and, importantly, works with young people at risk of offending. I have had the opportunity to visit many of those locations and I speak regularly with the service providers, including the many Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that do this intensive work with young people. I have said previously, and want to highlight again, that each location has the capacity to work with up to 10 young people. Of course, the program helps not just those 10 young people but their siblings and families as well. It is a significant piece of intervention and support that is being provided to young people and their families to deal with underlying issues, whether it is substance abuse, domestic violence, trauma, mental health issues or poor attendance at school. I am very proud of the Target 120 program and the difference it is making. We know that nearly half of participants are not having any future contact with the police. Early intervention is the key to solving complex issues for disengaged young people in communities. We will continue to back those programs.

Ms M. BEARD: What measures are used to determine the success of it? What is it measured against?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Like many or most or all—I think it is all—government programs, the Target 120 program is evaluated. There was an evaluation of Target 120 back in 2019, which served to provide us with important information to make some changes and to continue to roll out the program in the 20 locations. Likewise, another evaluation of the Target 120 program has been undertaken and that report is with government for its consideration at the moment.

Ms M. BEARD: Will that report be released?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The government is considering that report and that will influence the way in which we continue to roll out Target 120. An important part of Target 120, of course, is the connection between the various service providers and government agencies to do that wraparound work with young people. A critical part of the Target 120 program is that we have been working together with Treasury to assess the program and its value in assisting to divert young people from having interactions with police.

Ms M. BEARD: Just to clarify, will the outcomes and measurements in that report not be released?

Ms S.E. WINTON: That evaluation is being considered by government. That is appropriate because it will guide us in terms of any changes that we make to the program.

Ms M. BEARD: Are the 20 locations that the minister mentioned fully subscribed in terms of both resources to run them and the number of people in the program?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said previously, we are operating in 20 locations at the moment. Each program in each location has the capacity to work with 10 young people at a time. As of 31 March, there were 169 active young people in the program. Of course, that process also assists some 669 family members and siblings. At each site, young people are provided with intensive one-on-one support to develop a plan that is appropriate to their needs and ensures that they will get the support and intervention they need to be able to fully engage with the community, whether through being engaged back in school or supporting them into a traineeship or the workplace. It is a very individualised process for each individual young person in each place.

Ms M. BEARD: Is it fully resourced in terms of the caseworkers for each of the Target 120 programs in each of those locations? Are there no vacancies in the people to run the programs?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Vacancies in terms of?

Ms M. BEARD: In terms of the people who are running the programs. Are there any vacancies in FTE to run the Target 120 program?

[4.30 pm]

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Ms S.E. WINTON: The program is fully funded in those 20 locations to work with 10 young people at a time. From time to time in a particular location, a service provider may have vacancies within their organisation and they do everything they can to fill those positions. At the moment, most of the organisations have their full contingent of FTE that is provided as part of the funding as we currently have 169 young people actively engaged in the program.

Ms M. BEARD: I am trying to understand whether there are some vacancies in some locations.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Mr Whitehouse to elaborate a little bit on the program.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Thank you, member and thank you, minister. For Target 120, as the member knows, young people are selected through a cross-section of data from the Department of Education, child protection and police. That means a range of children and their families are always actively being worked with, as well as what we call open cases. Although we are currently working with 169 young people, something like 177-odd open families are ready to come in that we are working with. There are 20 sites, which have been rolled out for some time. They are staffed and in operation.

Ms M. BEARD: Are those 20 locations fully staffed at the moment?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I understand what the member is asking. Like I was trying to say in my answer, I am not sure whether this is helpful. Particular service providers, whether they deliver Target 120, Breathing Space or any other government service, from time to time will have staff changes or vacancies that they have to manage internally, but they are still able to deliver the services they have been contracted to deliver.

Ms M. BEARD: Going back to my initial question about the funding not going beyond 2025–26, is that in line with a review?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have a big focus on what is being implemented and ensuring that when we invest, we do so well. As I said before, Target 120 has had great success with nearly half of young people not engaging with police contact after exiting the program. I will continue to focus on programs for early intervention and supporting young people to take the right path. In doing so, I am also keen to learn of the successes of the program to ensure that any future investment is really impactful.

Ms M. BEARD: To clarify, there is no funding past that point in time because the minister wants to assess it and work through what has worked and has not worked, and she will determine that at the time?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 506 and paragraph 10.4, which refers to new refuge beds. How much has the government provided for new refuge beds in this budget?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think I have answered this question before but I am happy to do so again. As I previously said, our government funds some 44 refuges and safe houses throughout Western Australia. Half of those are in the regions. Since coming to office, we have increased the capacity by some 60 refuge units, which is just shy of a 27 per cent increase in crisis accommodation. In the latest announcements of funding from November, through the taskforce to now, the \$160 million of funding will see the delivery of 77 additional units, which are currently in the pipeline. That includes \$22.6 million to rebuild and triple the size of the Stirling Women's Refuge and \$6.6 million to support the operational funding of Ruah Community Service's new refuge in central Perth. It will extend funding to the Munda Mia facility, as well as support rapid rehousing and Safe at Home programs throughout the state, as I mentioned previously.

Ms L. METTAM: Apologies if the minister has already provided this answer. How many women have sought assistance from a refuge over the past 12 months?

Ms S.E. WINTON: On any given night, 284 units are available for women seeking crisis support. By units, we mean accommodation available also for children or siblings.

Ms L. METTAM: I am asking about the demand and how many women have sought assistance from a refuge. Can the minister also give an indication of what it might have been in the previous year? I assume the minister would have that information.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide some further information.

Dr N. Leggett: All our refuges and safe houses record their client information on an information platform called the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform. It is managed by the commonwealth government through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. It produces regular reports, which are available in the public domain, related to client-supported refuges.

Ms L. METTAM: Given that, does the minister have that information or is she able to provide information on the demand and to what extent it has grown for these services over the last 12 months?

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Ms S.E. WINTON: I will generally say, further to Dr Leggett’s advice, that it is available in the public realm. I will acknowledge that family and domestic violence continues to be a scourge in our society. Women are seeking support in a variety of areas, including crisis accommodation and supports in other ways. This government will continue its record funding of not only crisis accommodation and perpetrator responses as we discussed earlier, but also the important piece around primary prevention. I will always urge a woman to come forward and seek assistance.

[4.40 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister aware of how many women seeking assistance at a refuge have been turned away over the last 12 months? Is that recorded?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I know that family and domestic violence continues to be at unacceptable levels, and this government will continue to provide record funding into all streams of its FDV response. There is always more to do. In terms of the supports available for women, our crisis support is part of a broad range of supports that are available for women seeking assistance in fleeing family and domestic violence.

Ms L. METTAM: Given the significance and importance of this issue, does the department keep a record of how many women are turned away due to a lack of capacity in the system?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am well aware of the significance of the issue of family and domestic violence, member, and so is the government; it has been since it came to government in 2017. It is a priority of our government. We have made a significant record investment of some \$47 million since coming to government. That is not only helping many, many women to escape violence, but also ensuring that, wherever possible, they can stay in their homes. We have never shied away from the fact that there is more to do. We will continue to do more, and we will continue to listen to the sector about what our response should be.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the department record the gap? Is that even a measure?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The answer about where that data is held was provided by either me or Dr Leggett. I can assure the member that I am well aware of the significant issue of family and domestic violence in this community. We will continue our record investment in a range of areas, including crisis accommodation, as is reflected in the services and the 27 per cent increase in funding, which I explained before, since 2017. Importantly, since November, this will allow 77 more units to come online.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister referred to Dr Leggett’s response, but she referred to the number of women who are using these services. I am asking: does the department record the number of women who are turned away?

Ms S.E. WINTON: What I meant by saying that Dr Leggett has provided that information is that the dataset she referred to is what we as a government use in determining our investments.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer to page 504 of budget paper No 2 and the spending changes, specifically the line item “Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services and Indigenous Healing Services”. Can the minister please explain how this funding will support existing services?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy to provide some information to the member. I want to acknowledge the member’s advocacy on the really important area of providing support for children and young people who are victims of sexual abuse—he is quite an inspiration.

The Cook Labor government takes preventing and responding to sexual child abuse extremely seriously. In 2018, our government committed to implementing all the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The spending change in the 2024–25 budget reflects a 15 per cent uplift in the base funding for child sexual abuse therapeutic services, or CSATS as a lot of people know them, and, importantly, providing an uplift for Indigenous healing services to ensure a continuation of the contracts and to support stability in the sector. Our government contracts 13 CSATS and two Indigenous healing services across WA to provide support, counselling and therapeutic responses to children, young people and their families who are affected by child sexual abuse. Indigenous healing services respond to the unique needs of vulnerable Aboriginal kids and families by taking an Aboriginal perspective to health and wellbeing. The budget also includes recurrent funding of \$667 000 annually for the Kimberley Sexual Abuse Prevention and Support Service. It works closely with the Department of Communities, the Western Australia Police Force and the Kimberley joint response team when responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse and provides therapeutic counselling, interventions and support in East and West Kimberley and remote communities. Of course, these uplifts are important. The sector has advocated long and hard for these important uplifts so that it can continue to do its important work.

I put on the record that the delivery of our 2017 election commitment—the member for Bassendean was pivotal in this—resulted in legislation being passed to lift the statute of limitations for victims of child sexual abuse so they can pursue civil action. We have introduced the reportable conduct scheme, strengthened our working with

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children screening and implemented a series of activities to develop child safe organisations. This is important work. We know that as we heighten our response to keeping children safe, and rightly so, we also need to ensure that when children and families come forward to report that, we back and support the therapeutic services that are required to give them the opportunity to heal.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 524 and the line item “Regional Childcare”, which is halfway down the page under “Community Services”. Why does the allocated amount drop significantly over the years, with no allocation in 2025–26?

[4.50 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: Early childhood education is a really critical part of supporting children in our community, making sure that they develop in those early years. Early childhood education and care services are also critically important as they provide opportunities for parents, particularly mums, to return to work. We made an election commitment of \$5.1 million to support ECEC services, particularly in regional WA. Having visited many country towns, one of the key things people talk to me about is the provision of quality childcare services in their towns. That sector, like many other sectors, has real workforce challenges at the moment. It is critical that we continue to support them.

The first part of that \$5.1 million election commitment involved two rounds of applications. I think the third round has just closed. We sought applications for funding from local government authorities to provide support for early childhood education services in their towns. We distributed \$530 000 over the first two grant rounds. As I said, the third round has closed. We will be making some announcements about the successful local government authorities.

Generally speaking, those small shires and towns that were successful have been using the funds for accommodation and relocation subsidies for the educators coming to town. Others have chosen to use the money for professional development of existing staff and also for course costs for new trainees. The \$4.1 million was subject to a separate round that closed in November. I will be making an announcement on the investment around the state to further support those grassroots early childhood education operators in the regions.

It is not in my portfolio area but wherever I go, one of the key things that is also supported by the workforce and those early childhood education operators right around the state is the significant savings gained as a result of our fee-free TAFE courses, particularly for early childhood educators. It is not insignificant; we are talking about payments of up to \$10 000. All those people who want to undertake cert III or diploma courses in early childhood education can do so for free. Those two courses have seen the biggest uptakes of all the fee-free TAFE courses that are included. I encourage lots of people to continue to apply. As a former teacher, I can say that there is nothing better that people can do than go into the education sector.

Ms M. BEARD: Just to clarify, given the importance of regional childcare facilities and early education, is there no funding for regional child care in 2025–26?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, this is a really important investment into regional child care. In particular, after announcing funding of \$4.1 million, the government sought submissions from organisations and operators right around the state on innovative ways they could network and support each other to build capacity. I look forward to announcing the results of that tender process soon. We will continue to work with the sector to determine what else we can do to support an absolutely essential service in every regional town—that is, good quality early childhood education services.

Ms M. BEARD: Notwithstanding that, I do not understand why there is a gap in 2025–26, which would stop the continuity of regional childcare services in some cases.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said before, I will be announcing a specific grants program soon. We will consider what else we can do to support the early childhood education sector in the regions.

Ms M. BEARD: In my mind, there will be no funding for regional childcare support or regional childcare facilities in 2025–26.

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, it is a bit like my answer to the question about Target 120 programs. I am really keen to see what projects and initiatives I will be announcing next week. We will give them an opportunity to roll out and learn from them. That will be the basis on which we will make investment decisions in the future. I want to see them operate so that we can be informed about future investments.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 520 of budget paper No 2. I would like some clarification on the line item under “Other” just over halfway down—“Safe Place—Youth Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Homelessness Program”. I am keen to know whether the amounts are for services or infrastructure. Looking at the numbers, it seems that they would potentially be for infrastructure.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Just to clarify, is the member talking about the line item “Safe Place—Youth Mental Health —

Ms M. BEARD: It is the health and alcohol and other drug homelessness program.

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Ms S.E. WINTON: That comes under Minister Carey’s portfolio.

Ms M. BEARD: So there is no interface between them.

I refer to page 524 of budget paper No 2. Towards the bottom of the table is the line item “North West Aboriginal Housing Fund” and then “ACCO Aboriginal Employee Housing Grants Program”. Is that linked in any way to Communities? Is there any infrastructure in that that works with Communities?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Apologies again; it comes under Minister Carey’s portfolio.

Ms M. BEARD: I just wanted to ask whether Communities gets involved in the requirements of what those Aboriginal community-controlled organisations determine is needed.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes, Communities does get involved, but it is under the remit of Minister Carey, not me, so he would be able to answer that question. Communities is definitely involved.

Ms M. BEARD: Sorry, I have lost my place.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I know the feeling!

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to service 4, “Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence”, on page 509 of budget paper No 2. Given the significant concern that the minister has recognised, can she explain why funding for preventing and responding to family and domestic violence has fallen 22 per cent—from \$145 million in 2024–25 to \$112 million in 2027–28?

[5.00 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: I reject the notion that we are decreasing funding for the prevention of family and domestic violence. The variation that the member is talking about takes into account changes that will come about as a result of investments and contributions from the national partnership. Likewise, some of the investments that the member will see in this year’s budget are time-specific in terms of making sure that we deliver on them. That will then determine future investments that we cannot put into the forward estimates until that important work has been done as part of the reform of the system.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the third line item of the service summary on page 509, “Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services”. Can the minister advise why this funding is dropping? It is falling—not as far as the figure I mentioned previously—from \$127 million to \$125 million.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I will give a similar response to the previous question. I can reassure members of our commitment to early intervention programs, particularly in child protection. As I have said previously, our announcements of funding investments are very much determined by the evaluation of the programs. Likewise, in this portfolio, whether it is Target 120, which I spoke about earlier, or other initiatives, we will be guided by their evaluation before we make those investments in the future. That does not take away from this being a priority area; it is a responsible way of investing in programs to ensure that we invest with impact.

Ms L. METTAM: I note that this funding is for early intervention and family support services. Is the minister able to provide information on what the take-up rate has been for those services or programs?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The early intervention and family support services to which the member referred is quite comprehensive in the kinds of initiatives and programs that it covers. It covers things like family support networks, Aboriginal in-home support services, intensive family support services and the regional service model. I am advised that from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, some 7 200 clients were supported by the family support network and 445 cases were supported by the intensive family support service. That is the service I referred to earlier whereby 80 per cent of children who were part of that service remained safely at home with their parents after 12 months, and 205 cases were supported by the Aboriginal in-home support service that I talked about earlier. That service is showing great success as well, in that 85 per cent of children whose families were referred to that Aboriginal in-home support service have remained safely at home with their parents after 12 months.

Dr K. STRATTON: I refer to the spending changes on page 504 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “16 Days in WA Community Grants Program” under the heading “New Initiatives”. How does this program contribute to the prevention of family and domestic violence in our communities?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question and the opportunity to talk about a key part of our approach to tackling family and domestic violence. At its heart is getting everyone in the community to recognise that everyone needs to play their part. Last year the 16 Days in WA program was in its seventh year. This government started it as a public awareness campaign around family and domestic violence. Last year’s theme was “Stopping Family and Domestic Violence: Play your part”. The 16 Days in WA campaign is incredibly important. Each year we build on the success by building awareness and the conversations that are happening in every house around family and domestic violence. The campaign runs from 25 November, which, of course, is the International Day for the

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Elimination of Violence Against Women, right through to 10 December. It is challenging to find 16 orange things to wear! Nevertheless, it does very well and is an important awareness campaign.

Many activities take place around the state over those 16 days, whether it is education sessions, morning teas and people getting together and having conversations, or an arts event. Importantly, last year we provided \$50 000 in grant funding so that we could encourage more localised activities around the state. The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing received \$25 000. It administered a statewide community grants program to support organisations right around the state to hold events. Of course, \$25 000 went to Aboriginal Family Legal Services to support the ochre ribbon campaign during the 16 days. I attended many events as part of the 16 Days in WA campaign. It is a significant part of the calendar now and I know that plans are already underway to make it even bigger and better. By bigger and better, I mean that we need to do everything possible. A public education awareness program is a critical part of making everyone acknowledge that everyone has a part to play if we are to end the scourge of family and domestic violence.

Ms M. BEARD: Under the heading “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” on page 524 is the line item “Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse”. The funding significantly reduces in 2025–26 and does not appear in the forward estimates in 2026–27. Can the minister explain why there is no funding for that going forward?

[5.10 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I responded to a previous question, since 2008, our government has been committed to implementing the recommendations from the royal commission. An important key part of that royal commission was to provide child sexual abuse therapeutic services to children who have experienced sexual abuse. In this year's budget, 13 CSATS and two Indigenous healing services will receive an important uplift so that they continue that work. I might ask Ms Irwin to elaborate on that particular line item.

Ms C. Irwin: Thank you very much, minister and member. This is under the controlled grants and subsidies part of the budget. It is a one-off grant to the WA branch of the Australian Centre for Child Protection—ACCPWA—to develop and prioritise workforce capacity building as part of our implementation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommendations. It has been contracted to develop workforce capacity building and to deliver those courses. Once it is developed, it can be an ongoing online program. Some money will also be provided to two child sexual abuse therapeutic services that we fund to trial an advocacy function. Again, that was a recommendation from the royal commission. That function will then be evaluated, and the government can consider the outcome.

Ms M. BEARD: Once that framework is put in place, will consideration be given to funding those groups that actually take those functions on? Is that what I am hearing? Sorry; I might have confused the minister. I can clarify it if she wants.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think it is a bit similar to a previous question. It is a trial, and we look forward to the feedback and evaluation to determine future funding investments.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 507. I note the minister has previously touched on the family and domestic violence response teams. These teams are to operate on a seven-day basis across all 17 districts. How many teams are currently in operation across all 17 districts?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Since 2013, 17 FDV response teams have been operating in those 17 locations that I mentioned.

Ms L. METTAM: How many FTEs are allocated to these 17 teams in total?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I stated earlier, these FDV response teams are a critical part of supporting victim-survivors and, more importantly, keeping them safe. They work by having police, child protection staff and community sector partners co-located and working together to do that outreach. I am advised that the FTEs vary from site to site depending on the demand. Of course, in this year's budget, we will also expand them to ensure that we have a trial of men's workers in five of the FDV response teams to work with perpetrators. Also, 34 family and safety coordinators will be added. I think we are bringing those forward to make sure that they are part of that response, and corrective service officers will also be functioning in that place. I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide a little bit more detail about how that might vary from site to site.

Dr N. Leggett: Thank you for the question. As the minister said, the family and domestic violence response teams have been established for a while. They have been operating since 2013, with that core group of professionals being police, child protection staff and non-government family and domestic violence advocates. What is coming in this budget and is being built upon from previous budgets is expanding the capacity in those teams. Extra workers and FTEs will be brought in to help deal with the demand. One thing in this budget is \$25.6 million to increase staffing to move to a seven-day-a-week operation, because they currently operate five days a week. Extra FTEs will come online to work on the weekends and public holidays. That initiative has come out of a trial run over Christmas and New Year, referred to as Operation Keelia, which showed that it delivered much more timely responses to

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victim-survivors, particularly over the weekends. There was a much more immediate response to the perpetrator when the response teams were available on the weekends. The addition of adult community corrections officers to the 17 teams will be phased in over three years. We have a current trial of two teams working with a community corrections officer. It is essentially a scaling up of a pilot initiative to roll out statewide. There are 34 family safety officers who will be added to the teams, with two at each location. They are Department of Communities staff and their role is to work specifically with the highest risk cases and help support multiagency case coordination, a little bit like the Target 120 model. This will particularly recognise that when there are high-risk and high-complex needs, sometimes we need a number of different agencies to wrap around and help provide the service. The role of those two workers in each team will be to help do that coordination. We also have ongoing expansion funding for our coordinator response services, which are the non-government family and domestic violence advocates. They are receiving a boost of \$19 million over four years to help maintain their staffing at a higher level, but also to give them access to things like vehicles and brokerage so that they have a few more options for how they respond to victim-survivors.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I clarify a couple of things about how these teams will work? Firstly, will the uplift in additional staff come from the Department of Communities? Secondly, are these teams all at the same site or do they come together in response to a call-out or a crisis when it happens?

[5.20 pm]

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have been to three places now: Fremantle, Cockburn and a third place that escapes me. I think they work best when people are co-located. I guess that is why the feedback, one of the key recommendations and the focus area of the taskforce at the heart of this approach have been around the joint response and the sharing of information. The member can appreciate that, if there is an incident with police overnight, having someone like a child protection worker who can straightaway the next day access that data and share that intelligence will mean more immediate and appropriate responses and supports for that family. That is sort of at its heart. That is why the taskforce was so keen for us to invest further in this model. I am happy for Dr Leggett to elaborate in response to some of the member's specific questions.

Dr N. Leggett: I guess the specifics get to whom in the team the uplift is for. The expansion is particularly for child protection workers to operate on the weekends and for the non-government family and domestic violence advocates to work on the weekends as well. The family safety officers were a previous commitment of the government, but we are bringing forward the rollout. Originally, it had been planned that they would be phased in over three years, but we are bringing them all on in 2024–25. It was a previous commitment, but additional funding in this budget will make sure that all those workers are in place this year so they can start doing that case management role.

Ms L. METTAM: I imagine that one of the reasons the importance of these teams has been raised is the impact on children and the child protection concerns that are picked up. Does the minister have any evidence of how many child protection matters or incidents are raised as a consequence of FDV response teams? Child advocates have previously raised the importance of recognising the risks to the whole family unit, so it would be good to understand to what extent those risks have been identified and responded to.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think having a child protection worker in those teams is absolutely critical because the member is right: children are the victims in family and domestic violence situations as much as women are. It is important that the child protection workforce is there. It also allows child protection staff to then go into that family, work with the family and, potentially, connect them with some of the early intervention programs to prevent what may ultimately occur—the child having to be removed because of safety concerns. The child protection worker is an absolutely fundamental part of the family and domestic violence response teams because we know that, unfortunately, in many or most cases of family and domestic violence, children are present and they are vulnerable. It is a really critical part that allows a child protection worker to hook up within the child protection system to provide support to the family to keep the child safe.

Ms M. BEARD: Apologies if I have got the wrong area, but I think it is on page 515. I am assuming it comes under the child protection assessments and investigations or the care arrangements and support services for children in the CEO's care. My question is about the 24/7 call number. The previous minister said that there is a 24/7 number that people can call at any time of the day or night if there is a problem on the ground.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry. I am not sure about the line.

Ms M. BEARD: I think it comes under the care arrangements and support services, but I do not know where it fits within that.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Sorry, what page is it? Can the member give us a reference?

Ms M. BEARD: It is page 515. I am assuming it comes under the provision of safe and stable care arrangements and other support services for the safety, support and wellbeing of children. It says in the care of the CEO, but it

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is also about someone generally who may not yet be in the care of someone but needs help. Does that answer the question and make it clearer?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The support that is available on weekends for those circumstances, as the member knows, is the Crisis Care helpline.

Ms M. BEARD: Is it the same contact outside of office hours?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Yes. It operates 24/7.

Ms M. BEARD: I am sorry if I am confusing the minister, but the previous minister said that there is a number to call 24/7 and they will be able to help, but I have called it recently and previously. When I called it previously, it went through, and they were going to be in contact with someone on the ground in the location. How does that work? Is there someone on call all the time when that happens?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Mr Whitehouse to give a little bit more of an explanation to the member.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Crisis Care is a 24 hours a day, seven days a week service. There is a location where we have senior child protection workers on call and working 24 hours a day on shiftwork. Crisis Care responds in the metropolitan area. In country and regional locations where Crisis Care cannot respond, we also have a co-located worker with the police special operations command who is there all the time during the day. People are on call in different regions, and Crisis Care makes the decision when to call and disturb them on weekends to provide a response to people out of our office hours.

Ms M. BEARD: I am just using an example here. If I were to call that number from a region at three o'clock in the morning, would it be the police who intervene or would they call someone within each town to help that child?

Mr B. Whitehouse: It would depend on the nature of the call. Obviously, if it is immediate and life-threatening, the police will respond. Crisis Care will contact the police. If it requires a child protection response after hours, a phone call will be made to the on-call worker who would then respond. Depending on the situation, they would respond on their own or in pairs. Sometimes, they will respond with police for what is needed.

Ms M. BEARD: If a member of the community comes across a child and phones that number, does the child protection caseworker need to have the police as well? I am trying to get it clear in my own mind. It is a question I get regularly, and I am not sure.

Mr B. Whitehouse: Police are used for the safety of the worker or the safety of the child. The safety of the child is always paramount in everything, and the safety of our workers is as well. It will depend on any situation. In the situation that the member talked about, it will depend on myriad factors. If a member of the public comes across a child, it will depend on the location or the remoteness. For the immediate safety of the child, there may well be a direction for the member of the public to take that child to the police station. Then, typically, a child protection worker would respond after that.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I am referring to budget paper No 2, page 506, under significant issues impacting the agency and the prevention of family and domestic violence. The very last paragraph, 10.7, refers to expanding the Safe at Home program. Can the minister explain what the Safe at Home program is, which regions it is being expanded to and how it helps to keep victim-survivors safe?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have spoken about Safe at Home a number of times during this session, but I am happy to elaborate on what is a really important part of our government's investment in keeping victim-survivors safe. At the heart of what we want to do, if at all possible, is our wish to support women to stay in their homes. We previously talked about children, and we know that keeping women safely at home with their children is less disruptive for everyone, and that is our priority. The Safe at Home program helps to do that and has two key elements. The first part is around safety planning and supporting things such as security checks and audits, and doing necessary upgrades, whether it is doorbells or new locks. The second part of the Safe at Home program is ensuring that those victim-survivors are connected with various support services so they can continue on their journey in recovery from family and domestic violence. It is important that this program is continued to be supported because whenever possible we want to keep women safely at home.

The member talked about where it is being rolled out throughout the state. I recently made the announcement that the Safe at Home program is being extended to other regional areas including Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland and Kununurra, and earlier last year we announced it was also being rolled out in Katanning and Fitzroy Crossing. A key ask at the summit on family and domestic violence in August last year was more investment in Safe at Home, because whenever possible, we want to keep women at home where their lives, families and networks are, but do so safely. I am really proud that we are continuing to invest in Safe at Home.

[5.30 pm]

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Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to elaborate on what the take-up has been for the Safe at Home program? What has demand been like in the previous financial year and also the last two or three years?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I said, the Safe at Home program was a key ask from the summit talks and our sector partners. I am really pleased that we are continuing to roll out this program into all areas of Western Australia because we know that we need to keep supporting women to be safe at home. This program does that.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to say how many women have used the program in the last 12 months?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have been made aware that a national evaluation is publicly available. Certainly that, as well as our sector partners and the outcomes from the summit, have driven our continued investment into this area, because we know it is a much-needed investment to ensure that we continue to provide opportunities for women to stay at home if it is safe to do so. I am really happy that we have made this investment in this year's budget. We will continue to see what else we can do to build on a program that has been called for by the sector and that is welcomed by women who want to stay in their communities and keep their children safe at home to continue their normal lives.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 506 and the paragraph "Early Years Partnership—Child Wellbeing and School Readiness". It states —

... investment in support for families and community infrastructure directly responds to actions in the community-led plans launched in 2023. This will increase child wellbeing and school readiness by improving access to early learning opportunities, early identification and intervention services ...

How many FTEs are dedicated to that effort? What does it look like on the ground?

Ms S.E. WINTON: That is a good question. I could probably fill the next 20 minutes with that question. I am not trying to be flippant, but it is a program that I am pretty passionate about and one that is seeking to make a significant difference in young children's lives. We know that from ages zero to four is when 85 per cent to 95 per cent of a child's brain develops. This is about providing services and supports so that those young children can reach their potential and be school ready when they get to school. The reason I reacted to what it hopes to achieve or what it looks like is, like I said previously, this program is a partnership between the state government, Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Kids Institute. It is being delivered in four unique communities throughout Western Australia. I always use Katanning, because the name central great southern does not roll off the tongue, but Katanning is central to it. It takes in about six local authorities. Then there is Armadale, which is very different again; Derby and two outlying communities; and also Bidyadanga. These are four very different communities and four very different environments where young children are growing up. That means there are four very different kinds of responses and aspirations that families have in those communities.

A key part of the work in determining the programs and the infrastructure and supports that are going to be rolled out to those communities is about the community telling us what they need. That process was very consultative over a long time, whereby families talked about their aspirations for their children and what the challenges were for them in their particular locations. Like I mentioned previously, I would suggest there are some common themes in all four locations, but there are also key differences that show the uniqueness of those locations. For example, in this year's budget we have made the announcement to further back in that important program with our government committing a further \$15.6 million with a co-investment of \$19 million by the Minderoo Foundation, which will see 24 key projects. I say this again: they were not plucked out of the sky; they were designed and put together by those four communities. That money is an investment in 24 key projects that have been identified in those communities. They are very distinctive and unique and reflect the communities in which those children live.

For example, in Derby, one of the priorities is for the construction of an early learning and family centre. In the great southern region, where lots of families are living in a very scattered location, one of their requests was for increased child dental health services with mobile outreach to allow their children to get those important checks. In Bidyadanga, which is some 300 kilometres from Broome, families said that one of their key challenges is getting allied health workers and other support staff into the community. They want some accommodation upgrades to allow those workers to come into the community and do that important health screening and other support work. In Armadale, one key thing people identified as being really critical for their children is more child and maternal health checks.

It is a unique program, but, at its heart, it is place based. I did not mention before that the Telethon Kids Institute is an important, key partner in evaluating the program. I know that the Minderoo Foundation, the Telethon Kids Institute and the state government have great hopes for the delivery of more place-based services and supports for families and children. It is the way of the future. This work is also a really important piece of research for future policy on and investments into how we support families and young children. Importantly, we are very confident that it will make a great impact on young children in those four communities.

[5.40 pm]

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I refer specifically to the FTE. As I mentioned previously, the Department of Communities is the lead partner for government, but the Departments of Education and Health also play a role. In terms of the resourcing from the Department of Communities, I am advised that eight FTE help to coordinate this program, with one on the ground in each community. There is also support and central coordination from the Departments of Education and Health, which also put in FTE, as well as, of course, the support we get from Minderoo.

Ms L. METTAM: How many FTE is the state government funding as part of this commitment?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The \$15.6 million in this year's state budget and the \$19 million from Minderoo is specifically funding 24 key projects and infrastructure projects in those locations. The FTE and the support for coordinating the delivery of the programs has been and will continue to be funded internally.

Ms L. METTAM: The department is funding the organisations to run these programs. I am not sure whether the minister will be able to answer this question. What is the interaction with the families or the parents? What is their involvement in these programs, if any?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As I described before, the services are quite unique to each location. I was previously asked how many children this will have an impact on, and I think—correct me if I am wrong—in total, some 2 700 children in those four communities will benefit from the various programs. But I want to stress, as I have done before, that it does not mean 2 700 children will get a dental check, because a service is located in a particular location. It depends on the location and the services and programs that each community has identified and asked for, so it is really hard to quantify it in a uniform way.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a new question relating to page 506 and the prevention of family and domestic violence. Paragraph 10.3 refers to expanding and enhancing the respectful relationships program. What does the expansion of that program look like? Which schools are involved and what are the ages of the students?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I thank the member for the question. As the member knows, primary prevention is absolutely critical if we are going to end the scourge of family and domestic violence. Funding and supporting things like the 16 Days in WA campaign and other public awareness campaigns is another really critical part of that, but, like the member said, programs like respectful relationships are critical if we are going to make a change in young people's attitudes to what is very often gendered attitudes in our society, particularly in young people. We were the first government—I am pretty proud of this—to invest in primary prevention and we are continuing to build on that. Certainly, the taskforce also indicated that we need to double down and increase our efforts around primary prevention.

The \$72.6 million funding announced in November includes a fivefold increase in funding for primary prevention. I am just trying to find the bit that talks about respectful relationships. We have implemented and expanded the program into schools. We are now extending it to non-government schools, and, importantly, extending it to sports groups as well, which is really critical. I am happy to ask Dr Leggett to provide some more information about how we are increasing our funding for primary prevention, which is an absolutely critical element, because we really need to stop this violence before it starts.

Dr N. Leggett: Thank you for the question. The respectful relationships teaching support program first came into operation after a 2017 election commitment. The program commenced in 2019, and it was originally a commitment to offer the program in 10 schools a year. After the 2021 election, the program was expanded to 22 schools a year, and at the moment that is the number we are operating at. We have had 102 primary and secondary schools in the public system engage in the program since its commencement in 2019. At the outset, the taskforce—the Department of Education, Catholic Education Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools Western Australia—released a statement of commitment that they were going to make respectful relationships education compulsory in the curriculum in all schools across the three sectors. This expansion funding is about expanding into CEWA and AISWA schools as well so we can think about how we can back in a broader range of teachers to deliver the compulsory curriculum. We will continue the teaching support program as it currently is. It is quite a high-intensity program of support that engages schools for quite a long time—up to 12 months—but we are also looking at ways we can support a broader base of teachers to deliver what is now a compulsory curriculum subject in schools across all three sectors.

[5.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I probably missed it, but when was the agreement made with the independent schools? Was that last year?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide an answer.

Dr N. Leggett: It was in September last year. It was part of the announcement about the establishment of the taskforce.

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Ms L. METTAM: Is it compulsory for public schools to undertake this program? What are the parameters around the use of the program? Is it a certain age?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I think this question is best asked of Minister Buti in terms of what is compulsory or not compulsory in the curriculum. What I can say is that I will continue to encourage all schools to participate in not just the respectful relationships program as delivered through Starick, but also the many programs that schools individually do already in terms of respectful behaviours. I went to North Butler Primary School with the Attorney General and it has a program that runs from pre-primary right through to year 6 focused on anti-bullying and respectful relationships generally, rather than just the labelled program run by Starick. Schools have a role to play in that. In terms of the member's specific question about whether it is compulsory in the curriculum, I think that is a question for the minister.

Ms L. METTAM: Has the program changed in the last 12 months?

Ms S.E. WINTON: The content?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. What informs the content of the program and to what extent has the program changed?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Dr Leggett to provide the member with some information.

Dr N. Leggett: The respectful relationships teaching support program is operated by Starick, which is a family and domestic violence organisation operating in WA. Starick developed the content with advice and consideration from Our Watch, which is the national primary prevention foundation that essentially has a role in gathering together the relevant evidence about what works in the primary prevention of violence against women. The program has also been independently evaluated. There are ways in which Starick is continually thinking about and improving on it.

Ms L. METTAM: In terms of the objectives of the program, I imagine that the emphasis may have changed over time. What is the overall objective of respectful relationships?

Ms S.E. WINTON: As Dr Leggett said, it is an evidence-based program that taps into national best practice in terms of delivering curriculum. I am no expert in the respectful relationships curriculum or in that as a speciality, but all curriculum, no matter the subject matter, is constantly evaluated, reviewed, modernised and modified depending on the circumstances, such as whether it is for young kids as opposed to older kids or for the regions as opposed to the city. That is my expectation. When I have developed curriculum, that is what happened.

Ms M. BEARD: I have a brief question around the out-of-home-care program. There is a reference to the changes, which I support, at the top of page 506 of budget paper No 2. Those changes should definitely be sufficient in terms of turning the dial and making it a better outcome for these children. Some Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are involved. There is out-of-home care and foster care. When there are not enough foster carers in a location, does the ACCO or anyone else provide temporary accommodation for any of the children?

Ms S.E. WINTON: I am happy for Mr Whitehouse to provide some further comments on this really significant reform. I acknowledge that it has been a challenging and complex process for not only the Department of Communities but also service providers. The transition is complex. I agree that, as a result, we will see a system that is much more responsive to the needs of kids in care, and that is a good thing.

Mr B. Whitehouse: One new part of the system is the 17 temporary care houses. There is a care house for every district in the state, right from Albany through to the metropolitan area and right up to Kununurra. Those temporary care houses are local. They have four beds. They can take children for up to three months, either immediately when they come into care or if there is a care arrangement breakdown. A fair number of them are managed through Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. When a child comes into care, they will obviously have had trauma and be experiencing separation from their biological parents.

One thing that we want to make sure they do is that they keep the rest of the connections to their family. It is built into the contracts that these kids must still go to the same school and be taken to the school, as an example, to keep them around their connections. The intent of those children being there for three months is, number one, to work really hard to get those children back to their parents, because the best window to get children back is right when they come into care. The second thing, as a parallel process, is to identify family. So, they are close to their community and then we identify family for those children to go to. The third option is to find a non-family member to care for that child after the three months.

One of the important and really valuable parts of the new system as it relates to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations is that when an ACCO is caring for children in a temporary care house, the ACCO has the capacity to go and search for family for an Aboriginal child who may be in that temporary care house. ACCOs get access to people and have knowledge and networks that the Department of Communities may not have by reason of who we are. The ACCO can potentially transition that child straight from that temporary care house to a family member. That provides stability and connection. The intent is to either get that child home or into family.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Wednesday, 22 May 2024]

p280b-306a

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Ms M. BEARD: First, where are the 17 locations? Secondly, WA is an enormous state and a lot of regional towns are in dire need of this service because there are no foster carers. Is there a timeline for the ones that will be put in place?

Ms S.E. WINTON: Mr Whitehouse.

The CHAIR: Mr Whitehouse, you have about 30 seconds.

Ms S.E. WINTON: I have never known him to speak for 30 seconds!

Mr B. Whitehouse: They are almost all in place. There are two remaining. The 17 locations are linked to the 17 district offices of the Department of Communities.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm