

Mr David Templeman; Mr Rob Johnson; Acting Speaker; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Ms Lisa Baker;
Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Andrew Waddell; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr
Paul Miles; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Albert Jacob

SCHOOL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Motion

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house calls upon the Barnett government to provide guaranteed four-year funding, staffing and support to the School Volunteer Program, which does an excellent job supporting schools across Western Australia.

I am very pleased that this very important motion —

Point of Order

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I do not want to interrupt the member for Mandurah, but I think that I am right in saying that the member in whose name the motion stands must move the motion. The member has not done that.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis): The member for Rockingham's name is on the notice paper.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker. The member for Mandurah does not necessarily have to be the lead speaker. I am happy to speak first or later in the debate. Whatever is in accordance with the standing orders is fine with me.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I have always understood that the motion must be moved by the member in whose name the motion stands. I think the member for Mandurah can move it on behalf of the member for Rockingham.

The ACTING SPEAKER: My advice is that if the member for Rockingham is in the chamber, he is required to move it. If the member for Mandurah is happy, I am keen to give the member for Rockingham the call.

Debate Resumed

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham) [4.02 pm]: I thank you for your guidance, Mr Acting Speaker. We are all going through a learning process. I move —

That this house calls upon the Barnett government to provide guaranteed four-year funding, staffing and support to the School Volunteer Program, which does an excellent job supporting schools across Western Australia.

I put that motion on the notice paper because the School Volunteer Program is an incredibly important program for schools and young people across Western Australia. People from the volunteer program are here today and I particularly acknowledge Christine Gray, the chief executive officer of School Volunteer Program Inc. I had some contact with the School Volunteer Program during my 19 or so months as the Minister for Education, and I was always very impressed by the program and by the people who do volunteer work at the schools. I pay tribute to them. Volunteers, by their nature, are unpaid. They do a good job for the community for nothing more than the satisfaction it brings them and for the community benefit that their work provides to other people. The School Volunteer Program is a mechanism by which people can use their experience and knowledge that often has been developed over a lifetime. They have much to give but might well have left the workforce, or have much to offer but do not participate in paid work as an outlet by which their services can be offered. They want to offer their support and assistance to young people at our schools in Western Australia.

This program was introduced in the 1990s and the Gallop and Carpenter governments massively increased its funding. The program enables the volunteers to use the knowledge and experience that they have learned over a lifetime and for young people to be the beneficiaries of that experience and knowledge. We always talk about using the experience of others. People always ask why we do not utilise the benefit and experience of people who have spent 40 or 50 years in the workforce to help others. This program takes that experience and predominantly provides it to students at schools in areas that are in particular need of that type of support. The students, who might not have received mentoring or guidance from their families, are assisted with reading and numeracy through the school system. Millions of dollars worth of experience and work is being provided by community members to help young people, at a very minimal cost to the state. The idea is brilliant and the mechanism by which it is carried out—that is, by an independent body with its own board—is brilliant. It is not a bureaucratic mechanism, and it requires very little of the state yet provides much benefit to the state.

In question time today I was disturbed by the Minister for Education's response to the question she was asked about government support for this program. I was actually dubious that she would have done what I was advised she had done, even though I had seen it in black and white. As the former Minister for Education, I was always very supportive of the program and I was determined to continue to keep it in place, just as I was determined to

Extract from Hansard

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continue a range of things, such as the First Click and Second Click programs that help older people to improve their computer skills. I was determined to continue our working with children checks to make sure that the public could be confident that the background of the good people who are involved in the School Volunteer Program were properly checked and that they were appropriate people to be working in that sort of environment. I was a bit shocked today to see the minister's response. She was asked, firstly, why is there only one year's funding, and will she confirm that; and, secondly, why is she taking away the staffing support? They are important questions. Why would the minister take away the staffing support for the School Volunteer Program? As I understand it, the staffing support consists of a single teacher and a contribution of \$280 000. All the School Volunteer Program is seeking is continued funding so that it will know where it stands in the future. That is not a big ask, I would have thought, considering the benefit it provides. However, it has been advised that it will receive one year's funding only and that the staff member—the minister confirmed this in the house during question time—who is provided to the School Volunteer Program is to be withdrawn.

Dr E. Constable: One year, which you gave when you were minister.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I can hear the member for Churchlands getting snippy; the snippiness is coming through in her voice. She should reinstate the staff member and provide certainty about the program's funding for the future. That is not a big ask: reinstate the staff member and give the program certainty about its funding for the future so that it can continue to invest. That will provide certainty for the people who are employed there and for the mentors, who guide the young people in our community. They will then know that their jobs will exist next year and the year after that. It is not a big ask.

The minister also confirmed that a staff member from the program would be lost. That staff member, as I understand it, is a teacher. That single teacher, who obviously understands the education system, is being withdrawn, according to what the minister advised us during question time. That is a mistake. The value provided by this program with one teacher is huge. It is not a big ask, particularly in an environment, as the minister rightly pointed out, in which the problems that I faced as education minister, with the shortfall in the number of teachers, are largely resolved. As the minister acknowledged in this house, the reforms that we put in place over the past couple of years, the settling of the pay dispute, and the fact that we now have an environment in which far fewer jobs are available for people outside the teaching profession are three factors that have combined to ensure that we do not have a teaching shortfall. Therefore, why take away the program's staff member? As education minister, I was criticised by the minister's good friend the Minister for Training when I withdrew some staff from district offices in non-teaching positions and put them into classrooms. I was criticised for that. However, as I said at the time, the first obligation is to ensure that our classes are staffed, and that was the approach we took. The classes are now staffed; therefore, why be so petty? Why be so nasty as to take away a single teacher from this program? A single teacher! Surely the fact that we have had to raise this issue in this place today means that the minister will stand during this debate and say that she has changed her mind, that she was wrong, and that the government will give back the staff member to the School Volunteer Program and, in addition, will provide it with guaranteed funding over future years at the same level as, or perhaps even higher than, it is now.

Members should look at the reasoning for the program and at the number of schools, both metropolitan and country, that are involved in it—from memory, at least 253 schools—throughout Western Australia; it is an extraordinary number. Schools the length and breadth of the state are involved in the program and it is particularly concentrated in public schools, obviously, and also in schools in areas that we might say need the program a bit more than others. These schools might have a higher preponderance of students and children who come from backgrounds that are needy and do not have that mentoring advice and assistance in the home to provide them with the guidance that perhaps this program would provide. Looking at my own community of Rockingham, a range of schools—Bungaree Primary School, Charthouse Primary School, East Waikiki Primary School, Safety Bay Senior High School, Secret Harbour Primary School and Tranby College, which is a private school—access this scheme and use the services of its mentors. I have met some of the mentors and some of the people who have involved themselves in this process. They are older people, often women, who want to help young people with the basics of life; they want to help not only with things such as literacy and numeracy, but also by giving students a bit of guidance and assistance, based upon their experiences of life.

I read about the Minister for Education in the paper the other day, perhaps it was Monday, saying that some students arrive at school and do not know the basics, such as how to tie their shoelaces, and that perhaps they need some assistance when they go to the toilet and issues like that. I have heard the minister's views about these things. I might add that when I saw that article, I thought it concentrated on an often popular myth about young

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people. Certainly, my three-year-old, who is in kindy at our local primary school, needs help with his shoelaces and sometimes he needs help with going to the toilet.

Dr E. Constable: I did not mention shoelaces.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The minister mentioned going to the toilet and issues such as dressing and so forth, but I digress. The minister's comments catered to a popular myth, not often true. Of course, any parent of young children—I have a five-year-old and a three-year-old—and the minister might have forgotten, but I can advise her —

Dr E. Constable: I have grandchildren who are five and three, so I know exactly what they are like!

Mr M. McGOWAN: So why did the minister say what she said, because, of course, children need help with dressing themselves and with going to the toilet? She just ran down young people in Western Australia, parents across the state and our school system by saying, "Isn't it terrible that they arrive at school and need help going to the toilet?" Of course they do; they are three-year-olds—for God's sake! Anyway, I digress.

Returning to the issue, the broader point the minister raised that we might need more assistance for young people in schools and some additional guidance and mentoring is correct. The broader point is correct, but perhaps not the specifics of three-year-olds arriving at school who might need help to dress themselves and go to the toilet—certainly, experienced teachers understand that that is life, that is reality and that is where kids are at.

Mr A.J. Carpenter: Always.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Children at the age of three years, going back 100 generations, have always been in need of that sort of assistance, even though the minister does not seem to realise that. The broader point the minister made is that we might need better mentoring, assistance and guidance in schools, which is correct. However, what does the minister then do? She withdraws the support service for the schools that does that. The simple fact of the matter is that if she gives the School Volunteer Program back its teacher and gives certainty of funding, this problem will be resolved. That is all we are asking that the minister do. We have raised this issue on the basis of representations that have been made to us. The School Volunteer Program by its name—volunteers—has great people who do a great job. I express my support for the program and for the people who undertake these roles in my community. We wholeheartedly support them.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [4.16 pm]: I am very, very pleased that this motion has come before the house this afternoon. I draw the Minister for Education's attention to the wording of the motion. This motion does not attack the minister; it simply pleads with the minister to ensure that this very, very important, award-winning program in Western Australia, which is recognised outside this state as a model for mentoring in schools throughout the nation, be strongly supported by the government. The wording of the motion urges the minister to ensure the program's success by providing surety of funding for four years and also by ensuring that a seconded staff member from the department is attached to the program. I will comment on those two issues shortly. However, my association with the School Volunteer Program goes back to before I was elected to this place. It was not around when I was teaching. Although the program had its origins in the early 1990s, it never came into being in its current form until later in the 1990s. I know that the minister, in answer to a question today, referred to the first time the program was funded by the state government.

One thing I am absolutely passionate about in supporting this program is that when I was elected in 2001, a tremendous woman called Ailsa Rice—I always claim she was the first person who banged on my door after the election—came into my office. Ailsa was the coordinator of volunteers for the Peel district for the School Volunteer Program. The first thing she said to me was, "David, I want to tell you about the School Volunteer Program. You're the new member here and you must understand what is happening in your own electorate and your own region in terms of the value of this program." She said that she, as the local coordinator, wanted to work with me to support in any way possible the volunteers and the work they were doing in the schools in my region. Ailsa is also a previous board member and a past president of the board of management of the School Volunteer Program. She is a passionate woman and reflects, I think, the passion of those nearly 2 000 volunteers who are represented by people like Ailsa throughout Western Australia in more than 250 schools.

I am glad that some government members and some members of the opposition are in this place this afternoon. The member for Carine, the member for Wanneroo, the member for Morley, the member for Ocean Reef, the member for Darling Range, the member for Kingsley, the member for Swan Hills, the member for Murray-Wellington, the Premier and the member for Churchlands would be well aware that within their schools and all schools throughout Western Australia there are now men and women of all ages—a large number are in their senior years, but they are not all in their senior years—working in our schools with children and young people. These children and young people are actually assisted, one-on-one, during the week through this very important

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social and experienced contact with the volunteers. These volunteers are vetted very carefully. Anybody who works with children must be vetted carefully. The process of ensuring that the volunteers go through the working with children checks and are properly screened is done professionally and effectively by the School Volunteer Program, and has been for more than a decade. These people bring to the relationship that they have with the young people and children with whom they are working a very special bond that the teachers in the classrooms may not be able to establish because of their workload and because they are dealing with a range of children. The value gained from the School Volunteer Program is that experienced, passionate people in our communities can make a contribution to the wellbeing of a young person.

If any members in this place have not talked to the coordinator who coordinates the School Volunteer Program or sat down and had a chat with some of the school volunteers, I urge them to do so. They will find that these people not only genuinely believe that they are making a difference, but also have the runs on the board.

I could go through a list of awards that the School Volunteer Program has been successful in gaining. The list has numerous awards on it. The School Volunteer Program and the volunteers in particular, who are the most important part of the program, have been recognised for this very special exchange that they are able to create through their work in the schools, whether it is in our junior primary schools, education support schools, primary schools, senior schools or middle schools. The role that has been established for them is very special. Why has it been established so effectively? The reason it is so successful is that when the program was established—it is now celebrating more than 12 years of its existence—it was able to attract those people in the community who have the time, commitment, passion, energy and compassion to help children and young people.

I am sure that there would not be anybody in this place who would not understand how critical it is that support, resources and human contact are made available to young people and children as early as possible, particularly to those children who might be vulnerable in their academic or developmental progress. The school volunteers provide this extra support in schools in members' electorates and in schools in my electorate.

The history is there and the runs are on the board. The School Volunteer Program is a multi-award winning program that is unique to Western Australia. We should be absolutely proud that for some 12-odd years—with some activity prior to that—Western Australia had and still has a nationally recognised award-winning mentoring program that is delivering absolutely brilliant and fantastic outcomes for children and young people in our education system across state and independent schools. This program crosses all boundaries.

I remember that about two years ago, when I was Minister for Community Development, I attended a major function at the City of Stirling at which the then Governor-General Michael Jeffery was co-opted to be the national patron of the Western Australian-born School Volunteer Program. I wish I had his quotes with me, and I am sure Christine would have them. In general, he said that it is the best mentoring program he had seen. As the Governor-General of the country at the time, he wanted to get on board the School Volunteer Program. That is how the Governor-General at that time respected what was happening in Western Australia. I remember him saying to me and Christine Gray, the chief executive officer of the national School Volunteer Program, that we have to get it out to the other states of Australia because it was the model for the other states of Australia. In fact, at the time Victoria and Queensland had already expressed an interest in looking at what was happening in Western Australia and copying that model for the schools in their states.

The multi-award winning School Volunteer Program that was born in Western Australia has been delivering quality outcomes through nearly 2 000 volunteers to literally thousands of children in 250 schools over the past 12 years. When I think about this program, I wonder what would have happened if this program did not exist now and had not existed for the past 12 years. How many children and young people in this state have been assisted through this program as a result of that quality one-on-one contact with the volunteers? If the program had not been established, how many children and young people would have missed out on that opportunity and where would they be now without that connection?

Minister, I mean this honestly, and I know I play it up and engage in theatrics at times: I am passionate about this program, which is so critical that it is above politics. I do not care if former ministers gave it only one year. If they did, I am afraid they perhaps did not realise the critical importance of this program. I remember standing up in caucus about four years ago to remind members of the need to continue funding, which at the time was about to run out, for the School Volunteer Program. We gave it four years forward funding in 2004, which would have taken it to 2008.

Dr E. Constable: It was three years.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is right. The reason we need continuity is that there is in place a framework in Western Australia in 250 schools, with nearly 2 000 volunteers assisting thousands of students, that is operating well. It is a well-oiled machine. The program is under pressure from schools that are not involved in it because

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they want to come on board. There are regular requests from schools that have heard about the program and want to come on board. The challenge for the School Volunteer Program is to find more volunteers who are prepared to work with children, some of whom are difficult to work with. To be able to do that and to grow the program to deliver the quality outcomes for these young people throughout the state, continuity of funding and surety is necessary. The program coordinators need to know when they are planning for 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 that they have the state on board for four years. We are asking for funding for the program for four years. The program has the support of some of the other funding agencies. Lotterywest has assisted in the past. Even local governments have assisted in kind. There has been tremendous support from other groups. However, the critical funding comes from the state—from the Department of Education and Training—because it is with that funding that these people are delivering the outcomes that are so important.

Surety is one issue. The other issue—this is really important—is the position of the seconded departmental staff member. Some tremendous seconded staff members have been attached to the School Volunteer Program over the past few years. The role of that person is critical to the program also, because there is an interesting interface. Community members, community volunteers and a community program structure run brilliantly by the board and managed tremendously well by the chief executive officer and her staff interface with schools. One of the important parts of that interface is the departmental person—the person who has been either a seconded teacher or a person seconded from a management position within the education department. That person is the link—the liaison person between schools, school protocols and the School Volunteer Program and the area coordinators, whether they be regional or metropolitan. That person is the key lynchpin. To take away that person's position begins to tie one hand behind the back of the program itself. It is taking away the expertise of that person and that position, and the valuable departmental knowledge of how processes and protocols work et cetera. It is also taking away, in my view, the symbolic recognition of why this program is so critical.

I am sure that the minister is aware—I know that she is a reasonable, decent person —

Dr E. Constable: Thank you.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, she is—honestly. What we are asking —

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, this is above politics—only until the close of business today! To ensure that the program continues, we are asking the government to give these people the surety of funding for a four-year period and to maintain that critical seconded person. To be honest, I believe that two people are probably needed because of the vastness of the state. There are 250 schools and there are nearly 2 000 volunteers. I guarantee—I do not often do this—that every single member of this place would have at least one school in his or her district in which the School Volunteer Program has volunteers working. I will not go through them. The member for Rockingham went through some of the schools in his electorate. There are 10 in Mandurah itself. I have only three minutes left.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am very passionate about this issue, so I needed the extension. This issue is very important. Some of the schools in the list, be they in regional Western Australia or in the metropolitan area, also correlate with the schools that are priorities for the department because of the types of students attending those schools. We need to understand that in some of those schools in which there are children with behavioural difficulties, including classroom behavioural difficulties, or academic or developmental concerns or difficulties, quite often there are more than one to 10 in the class. The volunteers who go into those schools are a wonderful additional resource and provide wonderful support in addition to what the teaching and the non-teaching staff are providing in the classroom and that the principal and the deputy principals are overseeing in the school curriculum and program. In fact, I will table these two lists. They are the lists of all the schools in Western Australia that are serviced by the School Volunteer Program. Members will note that the ones in Mandurah are underlined.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I ask members to look at those lists. If members have difficult schools in their areas, whereby socioeconomic issues are having an impact on those schools, they will invariably find that the School Volunteer Program is operating in those schools. School volunteers will be working with the teachers, the principal and the school community to make a difference for those kids. For 12 years this has been happening in Western Australia. Outside this state, this is recognised as a program that has immense value. This is an opportunity for the minister and for the Barnett government, and I will applaud them if they take it up. I will make a promise, minister. If the program is given funding for four years and the seconded officer is returned to

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the program, I will absolutely laud the minister for it. That is how important I think this issue is. If the minister understands—I think she does—just how critical this issue is and delivers what we are pleading with her to deliver, she will be not only lauded for it, but also remembered for it. We may not build a statue for her, but we might find something else that is appropriate.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I think she deserves one.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: She may do, if she does this. Honestly, I will laud her, because I believe that this is one single important thing for a relatively small amount of money. This is not a big money ask at all. We are talking about a seconded person. I know that the School Volunteer Program made a submission asking for extra dollars, which really talks about how the program can continue to grow. If the minister does that, she deserves to be supported and lauded for it; she does. Therefore, I am pleading with her to do it. Members, I mean this: of all the programs that I have seen operating in my eight years in this place and in my nearly 20 years of community service as a local councillor, I can tell members honestly that this School Volunteer Program stands above all the others. I support a range of programs, and I am patron of a range of them. However, if I had to name the one that deserves support to the level that we are asking for, it is this one. I am not saying that just because I used to be a teacher. Why? It is because I have seen the value and I know the value of what the School Volunteer Program is delivering. I have talked with, met with and seen in action the school volunteers in my electorate. I ask members to also do that. They should please find out who those volunteers are. They should talk to their local area coordinator and get to know those people. They will then find out for themselves why I am so passionate about this program. They will also understand why the opposition has put forward this motion and why, because of its value, I have put this program at the top of the programs that I support. I applaud the tremendous work of the nearly 2 000 volunteers throughout our state. I applaud the area coordinators who work with and look after those volunteers in the regions and in the various parts of the metropolitan area. They need support. A lot of them are dealing with difficult kids, and they need to offload and have debriefs, because some of the stuff that they see is pretty tough. But, gee, is it not great that Western Australia founded this program and that it is so much the envy of the other states that they want to try to copy it? I ask the minister to not allow this program to fall by not supporting it for a four-year period. Minister, please, please reinstate the officer from the education department, because that is a critical spoke in the well-oiled machine. This is no two-bit volunteer organisation, I can honestly assure the minister of that. This is a very, very, very high quality, effective volunteer organisation.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Why did the former government only do it for one year? Why did it not show a commitment of four years? That is what the member is asking for today.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am pleading with the government to do that. Quite frankly, we should have. My understanding is that back in 2004 there was a three-year commitment. I think last year —

Dr E. Constable: In 2005 there was a three-year commitment.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Which took it to 2008. Member, I do not know the answer to that question, but the reality is that it should not be a one-year concern. It needs to be a three to four-year concern, because that will give the surety. I will argue amongst my own people about that, but that is the reason.

Minister, I finish by saying, in support of those 250 schools throughout the state, in support of those nearly 2 000 volunteers, in support of the tremendous achievements that have been made by the School Volunteer Program, that this is not a big ask at all. This is an ask that will continue to allow the program to deliver outcomes for children and young people in the state. The minister will be lauded for it if she does as we ask. I will be the first person to stand on the hill and do it. I urge her to understand just how serious and how important this is.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I confirm, member for Mandurah, that approval is granted for the document to lay on the table for the remainder of this day's sitting.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition) [4.41 pm]: I support the motion that has been moved by my colleague, the manager of opposition business. The government knows very well what we are talking about because every minister received a copy of a letter sent from Christine Gray, the chief executive officer of the School Volunteer Program, to the Premier on 1 November 2008. This is what the letter said —

SVP has proven that the volunteer mentors “make a difference” to the lives of the students as well as their families, the schools and to their own lives. They are making a valuable contribution to the future generations of Australia.

The Board of Directors and our National Patron, Major General Michael Jeffery implore you to continue to fund our program. Without ongoing funding this program WILL CEASE TO EXIST!!! Which means 1800 volunteers, 2500 students and 254 schools annually will cease to receive over

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80,000 hours worth of assistance which equates to nearly \$2 million in financial value to the community.

Those sentences that I have quoted from the letter to the Premier in November 2008 and copied to all ministers pretty well sums up the case for the School Volunteer Program getting the support and the ongoing security it asks for. Instead, the government has actually cut the level of support it offers the program by withdrawing the seconded teacher. In my view this is another of those consequences of the unsustainable royalties for regions program the government has engaged in. This unsustainable program is the very foundation of the government. The fact that it is unsustainable, the fact that so much money has to be devoted to it, the fact that that money is poorly targeted, leads to all sorts of other negative consequences in programs right across the government—unnecessary cuts to good programs like this one. Public service redundancies—there will be cuts to services. There will be unfair wage outcomes for public servants as a result of this unsustainable deal, which underlies the very foundation of the government.

I will come back to why this program is necessary. We know that there is a continual society-wide demand for schools to do more. Every social problem results in a demand from some commentator or some interest group that schools ought to give priority to whatever the issue of the day might be. At the same time, there is a contradictory demand that schools do better in teaching the basics. We cannot give priority to both the basics and to every new social issue that emerges. Schools are under pressure to deliver the enhanced outcomes that society is seeking. At the same time, schools have been asked to accept students due to the very laudable raising of the school age—an initiative of the member for Willagee when he was Minister for Education. This means that students who would otherwise have left school are now staying on until year 12. At the entry level, we are seeing many students arrive with much poorer skills than they might have had in the past.

Dr E. Constable: Some are not toilet trained, which was the issue raised by your colleague when he spoke.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I will not go to that but I will say this: due to a variety of social dysfunctions; the fact that so many people are time-poor, because all the adults in the household need to work in order to afford a house, particularly if their wages are low; the unfortunate prevalence of drug addiction, alcoholism and domestic violence, quite a significant number of children arrive at school without some of the skills necessary to prosper in the classroom. That circumstance produces enormous stress for teachers. It is possible to argue that as many as 20 to 35 per cent of students in Western Australian government schools are students at educational risk. They have perhaps low literacy and numeracy levels, low self-esteem, lack of support at home, behavioural problems, lack of social skills, or perhaps they are from non-English speaking backgrounds. There is a combination of factors—high and growing expectations of schools and a more difficult group of students for teachers to deal with. Yet there is a limit to the additional resources that taxpayers can provide. There is a worsening of that limit on the additional resources that taxpayers can provide because of the combined effects of the global financial crisis on Western Australian government revenues, the loss of our share of the goods and services tax and the unsustainable royalties for regions deal, which is taking money elsewhere. Here we are, spending hundreds of millions of dollars, sending cheques to every local government in the country—not in the city, in the country—to spend on whatever they like, a \$400 million program, while we are refusing to provide continued seconded teacher support and funding security for the School Volunteer Program. Where are the government's priorities when that can be the outcome of its collective decision-making?

I will come back to the resources question. In this current financial year, expenditure for students in government schools should be around \$12 700 for each student, which is an increase of almost \$4 500, or 54 per cent, since 2001. During the Labor period, there was an enormous increase, a 54 per cent increase, in funding for each student in government schools. At the same time, the previous Labor government engaged in a massive school building program. More than 60 schools were built, the biggest school building program ever in the history of this state. Huge additional resources have been poured into our school system, in particular our government school system, but there is always a limit to the amount of additional resources that can be applied. I think that limit has just got tighter courtesy of our declining share of the GST, the global financial crisis and the royalties for regions deal. Schools could do more to target resources to those most in need, but there are rigid staffing arrangements and staffing formulas, and there are industrial agreements that make it awkward to provide fewer resources per capita to those students who are performing satisfactorily, and more resources per capita to those who are in real need. At the same time as we have these problems in schools, we have an ageing society, and we will have an even greater number of elderly people in the future. Those people will be living longer, and the proportion of very old people in our society will increase significantly. If those people are not active and involved in the community, their health status is likely to be compromised. There is a good reason for the current advertising campaign for which the slogan is “act. belong. commit.” It is a very good slogan, promoting mental health and health in general through engagement with society by maintaining a level of activity. The School

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Volunteer Program brings together these two issues. There are all these people with skills who have the spare time and the need, in their own interests, to be involved and to be committed, and they can help with the increasing expectations of our schools, the difficult cohorts of students that schools have to educate and the rigidity of staffing arrangements, which make it hard for schools to provide from amongst their own staff one-on-one student mentoring. The program is a very good one; it leverages currently underutilised social resources and we get a lot of bang for our buck with this program. We get a lot of bang for the bucks that we put in, but if there is a guarantee of ongoing funding, it will enable the program to approach other funding agencies such as Lotterywest and the federal government to secure additional funds. If one goes to the federal government or Lotterywest and says, “Well, we’ve got funding for a year but realistically, we might be closed at the end of the year”, why would those agencies make an investment? If the government wants and expects this program to continue, it should say so formally in the forward estimates to provide certainty that can be used as a basis for the program to go to other funding agencies to get the money it needs. It is very short-sighted to put the program in a position in which it cannot honestly and confidently say to other funding agencies that it has funding for a guaranteed period into the future. The opposition says—we hope the house will support the motion—that the funding ought to be for four years.

There is a way of dealing with this: it can be put into forward estimates so that everyone can see that the program will be funded for four years. I think the government actually intends to continue this program; I cannot believe that it would actually chop the program off. I think the government intends for the program to continue, so why does it not say so? Why does it not support the motion so that the program can use the motion to say to other funding agencies, “The Minister for Education, the Premier and the Treasurer all voted for this; we are going to be all right. You can support us with confidence.” I actually think that a bit of sleight of hand is going on here. I think the Treasurer is trying to manage his debt issues. I think the Minister for Education and the Premier know that the program will be funded, but they would rather not have that reflected across the forward estimates because then they would have to account for four years of funding for the program when they add up the debt, and they have a very pressing debt issue, a very pressing debt-to-revenue ratio issue, and a very pressing AAA issue. I know what can happen in these circumstances. It is not unreasonable to have funding for a period of years into the future—normally four years—and then a review to see whether the program is delivering its objectives. However, if there is funding for only one year, which is the current situation, and the government withdraws seconded teacher support from the program, it will cause the people running the program to lose confidence in the future and it will also diminish the confidence of other funding agencies in the future of the program.

I hope the situation is that the government supports the program but is unwilling to see it reflected in the forward estimates. The other alternative is worse—that the program is, in fact, due for the chop. If the program is due for the chop, it will be a tremendous loss to our system and a tremendous loss to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It will also be a loss to the volunteers who bolster their own health—particularly their own mental health—by making this very welcome contribution to mentoring young children. If the minister is going to say that the program is safe, I ask her to say that she will vote for the motion so that there is documentary evidence that the program can take to other funding agencies.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [4.55 pm]: I think this is a very good opportunity for me to speak in support of the School Volunteer Program. Members have heard a lot of arguments and passionate discussion about what it means at a local level for the School Volunteer Program to be working in members’ electorates. I would like to talk firstly about this organisation. Sometimes one forgets that there are some very dedicated professionals who build up skills over time—in this case, 12 years—to run this kind of program. We have already heard that this is an award-winning program, and it is a fantastic opportunity to help both kids and mentors—particularly seniors who want to become involved in the program. The School Volunteer Program has some very experienced staff who have worked on developing each thread of the program. They have an exceptionally good mentor development program. They first of all have to find the volunteer mentors in the community, and that requires a certain set of skills because they have to be very careful about who they find and how they match them with students. They also need to have the ability to train the mentors and give them the skills they need to go into the schools and work safely and confidently, quite often with some very vulnerable children.

One of the facts that is quite often lost in discussions about the not-for-profit organisations, charities and other non-government organisations that deliver these kinds of services is that when the funding cycles go up or down or become uncertain, as they unfortunately often do, the expertise that the organisations spent many years developing—12 years, in this case—is lost. The organisations may think that they have the budget to employ five, six or seven people, but then one of their funding agencies informs them that it will no longer provide funding, or that funding will be forthcoming for only another six or 12 months. It often causes staff to look

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around, because they have mortgages, lives, children of their own and responsibilities that they have to meet, so all of that incredible intellectual property that has been built up is lost. One of the reasons that governments particularly love working with charities and not-for-profit organisations is that they are passionate, very flexible, committed and have some incredible skills, many of which cost a minute proportion of what it would cost the government to deliver the same service.

If this program is not given some sense of security or certainty about its future, it is likely to lose a number of its staff, and with them would go a great deal of expertise and experience in running this award-winning program, and in keeping volunteer mentors engaged with the program. The School Volunteer Program has a very experienced board with very good business skills, so I cannot possibly see how the government could have any problems with the credibility, reliability and validity of this board. I know that the board is engaged in a constant program of best practice in governance, and that it is improving on that all the time. It is certainly an organisation that can be trusted with the effective application of government dollars to its outcomes. This is a very strong organisation with a great board that goes out and actively finds partnerships, particularly corporate partnerships. It has a partnership on the go with the Good Guys at the moment, and we are waiting to hear how that will stand up in the next few years. This is not an organisation that sits down with a bowl and begs for money from the government as its only source of income. It is a very active, credible and strong organisation. All members have this organisation in their electorates, and it deserves our support. It certainly deserves notice when things look a bit unstable, as they do at the moment.

In my own electorate, Bayswater Primary School, John Forrest Senior High School and Embleton Primary School will be impacted if the organisation is not funded adequately to do its work. I have talked with the minister in the past about the needs of Embleton Primary School. It is probably one of the most vulnerable primary schools in my electorate, and it has some very challenging students to deal with. The School Volunteer Program works with those students and helps teachers and parents. We are not replacing teachers with volunteers, but they are doing an incredible job helping kids in the classroom connect with the real world, life skills and other generations in the community. I hear our Premier talking about the increase in antisocial behaviour. Questions about why antisocial behaviour occurs and how to stop it go straight back to the early years of a child's life—what is done with children, particularly those in the very young age group, and not only with parenting in the home. We need the kind of opportunities that the School Volunteer Program brings to our community. It is particularly effective in bringing older people together with very young children and adolescents. It shows them that the children are not much different after all. The younger people might be more into video games and spend more time online than grandpa and grandma, but they have similar values, and they can talk about those things. It is a fantastic opportunity. In making those connections and differences that many might think would push us apart as individuals, this program serves an incredible role in our community.

The minister is very aware of what a wonderful program this is and I am sure that she supports it. I know that some efforts have been made. For instance, Minister McSweeney has stepped forward to help this program out a bit with some support, but I know that that is a one-off. I know that both ministers involved will appreciate the direct importance of this program and its relevance in our community. I am certain that I know how valuable it is. I have here a list of schools that are involved, which members might like to have a look at later. There is a very long list of rural schools—in fact 86 of them—that might be affected if this program is unable to deliver what it has been delivering. They are all alphabetically listed, which is convenient for me, but they include Boyup Brook, Busselton, Carnamah, Geographe, Geraldton, Harvey, and Margaret River. I believe that in Margaret River, in the Treasurer's electorate, 40 mentors are waiting to be linked up at the moment. It would be tragic if they could not be linked into schools because of a lack of funding. Other schools include Narrogin, Vasse, Wyalkatchem and York. As well as the 86 regional schools, 177 metropolitan schools participate in the program, and 1 800 people are ready to help our youth to become better equipped to live in and contribute to the community.

The week of 11 to 17 May is National Volunteers Week, and it would be very sad if we were not able to achieve a better outcome for this incredible community group before that week. We need to give them something to celebrate given the work they have been doing, and it would be tremendous if this government could continue the funding beyond the 12-month cycle to enable this organisation to do its work with more certainty and to give children more certainty in the future.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [5.05 pm]: I rise to add some brief comments to this debate and to commend the motion to the house. The School Volunteer Program should be given maximum support by the Barnett government. We have heard that this is an award-winning mentoring program, but I would like to emphasise two other dimensions of the program. It is about enhancing and encouraging the spirit of volunteerism in our society. That spirit of volunteerism is one of the hallmarks of a civilised society. We need to be able to

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provide a degree of professional support to people who want to contribute to providing children with the kind of mentoring that will complement their more traditional educational activities. It is no use hoping that volunteering can do things on its own. It needs a degree of professional support, and that is why the program needs funding. There is nothing worse for a volunteer program than to know that its future is not secure; that there is a possibility that in 12 months' time the program will no longer exist. That kind of atmosphere is incredibly dispiriting and works counter to all the goodwill amongst the volunteers who want to make a contribution to the community and help people who are the most vulnerable sector through the education system, perhaps because they feel that that education system is not meeting their needs. This program is an ideal means of countering those problems. It is an opportunity for children to hear the life experiences of someone who is mentoring them, who perhaps has overcome some sort of educational difficulty that the classroom teacher has not suffered from. It is the core of why we need to support this program.

It also needs to be noted that volunteerism has an enormous multiplier benefit. It is incumbent on the government in Western Australia to attempt to achieve the greatest benefit from any opportunity, and volunteering, when fostered correctly, brings a wonderful benefit to our society. The sources of funding can include corporate partnerships, but underpinning that should be reliable government funding. In this case, the Department of Education and Training would be the obvious agency to provide the four-year support that is needed. The secondment arrangement needs to be reinstated for a similar period of time.

The need for this program in my electorate is particularly strong. A number of schools in my electorate are members of the School Volunteer Program, and they are all benefiting from it. The two high schools in my electorate—Southern River College and Thornlie Senior High School—are both participants, and the primary schools involved include Ashburton Drive, Gosnells, Thornlie, Wirrabirra and Yale. All are enthusiastic participants in this program. These schools have many talented students from all walks of life, including multicultural backgrounds. This program provides the opportunity to make sure that they are given the kind of education they deserve, and that they receive, where there is a need, complementary education from people who are perhaps outside the formal teaching profession, coming to the school to provide knowledge, expertise and commitment. I commend this motion to the house.

MR A.J. WADDELL (Forrestfield) [5.10 pm]: I, too, would like to make a couple of comments on this subject. But I would like to look at it from a slightly different angle, and for once I am not going to talk about computers. I want to look at it from the volunteers' perspective. This program operates in schools in my electorate also. Only last week I was at a school where people were talking to me about how they are struggling because they do not have enough teachers or programs. As they outlined to me, primarily, their biggest problem is that only about 20 per cent of the parents pay voluntary fees, which is quite low across the board. When we were discussing this, we came to a point at which we recognised that there was a lack of involvement by the community in the school. Kids were being dropped off in the morning; parents were going to work doing whatever they do and then picking them up in the evening, and that is it. They do not get involved in anything to do with the school. They do not take an interest in what is happening at the school. As a result, the school is suffering not only financially but also from the lack of input from outside the school system. That is one of the things this program does. It brings people from outside into the system; it brings life experience to students who might not otherwise get access to that. It also does something else: it sends a message that we are not a monolithic government-type body that does everything; we are a community. It takes a community to raise a child, as I think Hillary Clinton put it. I think that is true, and a nice step towards that is enabling people who have some time because they have retired or whatever to getting back to being involved in our communities and feeling that they are making a valuable contribution, that they are helping form that next generation and helping to develop their values and their skills et cetera. From time to time members have talked about the malaise in society, the decline of standards and all those awful societal problems, yet the School Volunteer Program is one part of the solution; namely, getting people involved in their own community.

I suppose we must ask the question: what are we asking for? We are not asking for anything that the government is not doing. The government is funding this program, and that is wonderful and admirable. However, anyone who has been involved in a not-for-profit organisation knows of the constant pressure and constant uncertainty. I am sure some members had the same experience as I had when I first became a member of this place. At the time, I had to open some bank accounts to set up my electoral allowance and things like that. I had all sorts of trouble with the banks because they could not fit my situation into the square boxes. They did not know where a member of Parliament sat, how our incomes work and things like that. This can be a problem also for people who work for not-for-profit organisations because there is no guarantee of continuity of their income; therefore, they can have difficulty getting mortgages and loans and planning their children's education. They can face a range of difficulties. I suppose the appeal simply is: it is a good program so we are going to keep doing it, let us provide certainty and let us move forward.

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MS J.M. FREEMAN (Nollamara) [5.13 pm]: I rise to support this motion. Knowing it was coming up for debate today, I contacted the schools in the Nollamara electorate to ask them about the School Volunteer Program because I thought it would be much better for me to do what I am paid to do; that is, represent their views. If they had said to me, “No, it is really not a good program”, I would sit and keep mum, but that is not what they said. They overwhelmingly told me that it is a great program. The comments included, for example, that they use the School Volunteer Program for kids who need one-on-one attention and assistance. As we can imagine, in an area such as I represent, although there are many good schools, there are also many conflicting, confronting and difficult situations that they must deal with. Therefore, it is vital that schools have the capacity to enable people to work with students and provide one-on-one assistance with their studies. It is integral to enabling good outcomes. I was told that schools use the program for students with particular difficulties or emotional needs and that it helps other teachers to focus on others in the classroom and that that is of great assistance to them. They talked about the work of the School Volunteer Program for children struggling with literacy and numeracy and how sitting down one-on-one benefits kids, especially those who may not get that assistance at home. Teachers talked most of all about how volunteers had the time, experience and patience that often they, as teachers, do not have.

I have risen mainly to provide their experience of the School Volunteer Program. One of the comments was that it is a win-win situation. It helps kids feel better about their work and gives the mainly retired volunteers a real sense of achievement, a sense of community and a sense of participating in the community. I say to members that the program has rewards for both students and volunteers. The volunteers develop a strong bond with the children that, sadly, may be lacking elsewhere. It allows the students to build confidence both socially and academically; it increases their self-esteem, as one of the schools I rang said; and it helps increase their confidence and abilities.

Clearly, given it has been said that funding has been committed for 12 months, the issue is certainty of funding for a period and the continuation of the program. My understanding was that ongoing certainty of three-year funding had been provided by the previous government. I have yet to see the evidence that the commitment was for just one year, but we can probably look at the budgets for that information.

My experience as a volunteer board member on community legal centres for 15-odd years is that certainty for service delivery in particular is paramount. I am not sure whether the School Volunteer Program requires insurance and indemnity for their volunteers or whether that is picked up by the education department. That often requires certainty in light of the need to negotiate contracts. The member for Maylands outlined very comprehensively the need for staff stability. Certainty of funding the School Volunteer Program is important for the sake of managing, retaining and increasing expertise. I did most of my volunteer work with the community legal sector. A very important time was the negotiations with the federal government for five-year funding periods. That was paramount to the health, success and ongoing growth of those organisations and their capacity to deliver services that were well needed in the community. This volunteer organisation is no different. It needs ongoing support and services. Our teaching resource is vital as an ongoing source and I commend this motion.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [5.18 pm]: Following in the wake of the member for Nollamara —

Ms J.M. Freeman: Wake? Yes.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am a retired naval man; I could say, following in the wake, in the wash or possibly in the slipstream! Following her magnificent effort I would like to draw on an insight the member for Nollamara gave by choosing to begin by determining whether this program is supported in the community and whether it is worthwhile. I would like to follow on from that by acknowledging that she—and others on this side of the house—has clearly demonstrated by her research that this program is well worth supporting and well worth giving certainty to. In these troubling and uncertain times it is essential that all organisations, most particularly organisations such as this, are given certainty. Clearly, the Volunteer School Program is worthwhile. But I would like to ask, from the other perspective: what happens if we do not fund organisations such as this? What is one of the key outcomes of the School Volunteer Program? I have done some research. I did not have to go far because I found an excellent media release from the opposition’s spokesperson for education. One of the statements she made—I believe that this is an accurate statement—is that the volunteers in this program are trained in issues including drugs, communication skills and reading. Antisocial and offending and behavioural issues can often be prevented by providing young adults with a stable mentor.

Dr E. Constable: Where is she now?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am here now, minister. Relax! I have the responsibility on this side of the house for commenting on corrective services issues.

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Dr E. Constable: What is the date of the media release?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is today. Clearly, an outcome that potentially has a positive impact on the rate of antisocial and offending behaviour is of interest to me. I suggest that it should also be of interest to the government.

Dr E. Constable: When was it?

Mr C.J. Barnett: What is the date of the media release?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I gave the Premier the source of my media statement. The Hansard reporter got it. The Premier and the Minister for Education can look it up in *Hansard* when it is printed.

Mr C.J. Barnett: What is the date of the media release?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I have told you, Premier; it is today's date.

Dr E. Constable: That was a lot of research!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am referring to my spokesperson's comments. She made the good point that the outcomes of this program stand to be beneficial because they will reduce antisocial and offending behaviour. Why would that be important, minister? The Minister for Education will be interested in this. Why would she think that would be important? No doubt the minister is aware, as are many members, that our prison system is suffering from incredible overcrowding.

Dr E. Constable: I am aware of that.

Mr P. PAPALIA: The minister is aware of that. It is a serious issue. I have commended the Minister for Corrective Services for the attempts that he has outlined thus far to tackle the problem in the medium term by building additional capacity. I have also consistently encouraged the Minister for Corrective Services to view this matter as not only an immediate problem of overcrowding, but also an opportunity to try to tackle the rate of recidivism and reoffending and thereby reduce the number of people in our prison system in the long term. That will result in a reduction in the number of crimes committed against the community, and therefore a reduction in the number of victims. Ultimately, it will result in better outcomes. Housing prisoners incurs a double cost because, firstly, we need a facility in which they can be imprisoned and, secondly, it costs money to keep them in prison when otherwise they could be contributing to the community, which currently they do not do.

We could achieve fantastic outcomes even if we could manage to achieve only a minor reduction in the recidivism rates, particularly for Indigenous prisoners, who are disproportionately represented in our prison system. If we achieve only a minor reduction in the reoffending rate, we will have achieved an incredible outcome. Nevertheless, preventing offenders from going to prison in the first place would be a far better outcome.

Is it necessary to support programs like this? I put a few questions on notice to the Minister for Corrective Services, who very kindly supplied me with some answers to my questions yesterday. I asked the minister a question about the rate of juvenile detention and the impact on our prison system of failing to divert young people from our juvenile detention system and subsequently from our prison system. I sense—and I know that the minister does too—that we do not have all the data that we need to determine whether we are achieving good outcomes. I asked the Minister for Corrective Services a question to try to steer an effort in that direction. I asked him what percentage of juvenile offenders entered the adult custodial system, having completed their sentence in the juvenile custodial system. In effect, I wanted to know what percentage of juvenile offenders reoffend, which leads to them to receive an adult custodial sentence.

Mr C.C. Porter: It is 33 per cent.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I was struck by the fact that 33 per cent of juvenile offenders reoffend and then receive an adult custodial sentence. That figure does not even identify how many times the offenders have been in the juvenile system and then been released. I hazard a guess that in all likelihood many of those people have been in the juvenile detention system many times. Over four years, from 2005 to 2009, 33 per cent of juvenile offenders later entered the adult custodial system, resulting in a net addition to the adult custodial population of 154 people. That indicates, firstly, that we have the potential to achieve better outcomes regarding juvenile detention, perhaps through interventions. Secondly, it indicates in regard to the debate that we are having now that any effort we can make to impact on the number of people, particularly young people, who enter either the juvenile custodial or the adult custodial system must be an incredibly beneficial outcome. I suspect that the costs associated with interventions at the small end of the funnel will be dramatically less than the costs associated with trying to intervene at the custodial stage. Already we have seen that we have not been very successful.

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Mr C.C. Porter: From recollection, it is 33 per cent of 527 juveniles.

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is correct.

Mr C.C. Porter: In some areas, our recidivism rate for adults is as high as 60 per cent, and even higher. I agree that we can improve. However, that figure is not as bad as it sounds for this reason: the 527 juveniles, because of the sentencing practices in the Children's Court, are the hardened offenders. To receive a term of imprisonment in the Children's Court is an absolute term of last resort. You will find that those offenders are going to be fairly hardened offenders.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I concede that, Attorney General. My natural inclination is to acknowledge that it is a difficult challenge because they are the hardened offenders. That was indicated by the Auditor General's report into the juvenile justice system under the Young Offenders Act 1994, which the Attorney General has seen. A report from June last year identified that a very small percentage of individuals cost us the most and re-enter the system the most. I am getting a little off track from the debate that we are currently engaged in. In the spirit of hopefully achieving good outcomes, I see that as a challenge, and I always will. I hope that we can try to pursue that as an opportunity. All we have to do is have a small impact on the number of hardcore offenders to receive a far greater and magnified outcome at the other end. Those offenders are the ones who repeat offend and end up in the adult system. The same argument applies—the Attorney General would agree with me—regarding the disproportionate representation of Indigenous people in the justice system. The outcomes for the state and the community of achieving even a minor impact on reducing the number of Indigenous people who enter the custodial system would be far in excess of the effort.

It is a really challenging environment to try to come up with innovative ways of dealing with and providing opportunities for young people who offend. In the current environment, and with the way the community is nowadays, it is essential to provide an opportunity for the provision of good adult role-model mentoring of young people who are at risk. That is possibly where we can focus more of our efforts than perhaps we did when we were in government. I encourage the Minister for Education, if at all possible, not to assess this volunteer program just as a provider of educational assistance, which it clearly does, and not just as a provider of opportunities for the guidance of young people on drugs, and to learn to communicate and read better, but as an opportunity to facilitate often the most experienced members of society to go into schools and provide direct one-on-one assistance to the young people who are the most likely to end up in our judicial system later on.

I urge effort be made to provide certainty for this program, but I suspect, like the Leader of the Opposition, that perhaps this might be part of the politics associated with the budget process. I hope that the minister in fact plans to give the School Volunteer Program certainty over the longer term in due course. I will commend the minister for anything she does to ensure that this program is given certainty and that the people who participate in it know that their efforts are not only valued but are essential for better outcomes for the young people of our state. The School Volunteer Program has been going for 12 years. It is an award-winning program and all the comments made earlier by the member for Mandurah and others are quite valid.

I also want to place on the record that only two schools in my electorate engage in this program, but I know that it serves as an incredible aid to the professionals who are engaged in education on those sites. One of those schools is Endeavour Primary School in Port Kennedy, which has a dual campus; it has a special education campus alongside the other primary school. The school is a great model and I think it particularly requires every bit of assistance that it can get, because on a daily basis it is confronted by all manner of challenges as a result of the often difficult and challenging children that it assists. The other school in my electorate that supports this program is Secret Harbour Primary School. The program provides a key service in my electorate in only a couple of schools, but looking at some of the other schools the program is involved with, I can see that it potentially has an impact in the most needy communities. I look at Balga Primary School, Balga Senior High School and Hilton Primary School, for instance, all with significant populations of Aboriginal children and all no doubt in need of all the assistance that they can acquire to try to ensure that these children do not end up on the wrong side of the law and in our judicial system at a later date.

I conclude by saying that I lend my voice to support the motion that this house calls on the government to provide guaranteed four-year funding, staffing and support to the School Volunteer Program. I confirm that it does an excellent job supporting schools across Western Australia. I believe the program is one of our many potential tools for intervention to, in the long term, reduce our prison population and actually improve our society.

DR E. CONSTABLE (Churchlands — Minister for Education) [5.32 pm]: This has been a very interesting debate. A number of members of the opposition have spoken—the member for Rockingham, the Leader of the

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Rob Johnson; Acting Speaker; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Andrew Waddell; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Elizabeth Constable; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Albert Jacob

Opposition, the member for Gosnells, the member for Maylands, the member for Nollamara, the member for Warnbro—but no-one spoke with the passion of the member for Mandurah who clearly articulated, I think, for all of us the importance of this program. I am sure that I will not be as passionate as the member for Mandurah, but I would like to confirm and for him to know that I agree with him totally. I appreciate very much his presentation this afternoon to the house; thank you.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Thank you, minister.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Of course, the state government recognises the very valuable contribution that the School Volunteer Program makes and has made for many years, since 1996 in fact. I calculate that the program is coming up for 13 years, not 12. Therefore, it has very much been part of our schools during a very important period in this community. The volunteers have assisted many, many students in that time, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. We all know the importance of those areas and the concerns that we have for a number of children, particularly Indigenous children and children in disadvantaged schools who often need extra help in that area. However, the School Volunteer Program also assists in other areas and a lot of comment has been made this afternoon about mentoring schemes. It is interesting to note that there are actually reverse mentoring schemes as well, in which the youngsters are teaching the volunteers how to use computers. What a wonderful way of engaging those young people and giving something to the older people who are at the school as the students' mentors, and what a great way to find common ground between the young people and older people in our community. I repeat what others have said: many youngsters do not have that opportunity in their lives; they do not have grandparents around. With mobility and families, particularly single-parent families, there is often not the opportunity for young people to have contact with older people, and to have that relationship is extremely important. Indeed, if we go beyond the School Volunteer Program and further look at schools, we see that many other groups volunteer in our schools that are essential to the good working of schools—the parents and citizens associations, as well as school councils, and others that volunteer their time in schools. We depend a great deal on many volunteers in our schools and our schools work well because of it. I have often used the term that volunteers are part of the glue that hold our communities together in many ways, such as sporting clubs, other organisations and, particularly, our schools. Volunteers are part of the glue that holds a school together and makes it work well. I understand that in the past year 1 836 volunteers in—I have heard various numbers—about 253 schools have assisted up to 2 500 students, often those students who are most in need.

I will give a little history. It started in 1996 when the School Volunteer Program approached the then Premier Richard Court and also the Minister for Education, who is now our Premier, seeking support. The government in 1996 readily gave that support and the first grants were in the vicinity of \$30 000. After a few years that was increased to \$60 000 and the most recent grant has been \$270 000 over the past almost four years. I think that quantum leap from \$30 000 to \$270 000 over 13 years shows the support of Labor, Liberal and coalition governments. I emphasise, as others have, the great work done by these volunteers in our schools and I know that they will continue to do that work. Sixty-one per cent of the schools that volunteers are involved in are primary schools. Again, that is very important to note because it takes up the point made by several people, particularly the member for Warnbro, that working with young people and assisting them in this way will go a long way to helping those youngsters as they develop, grow and go beyond school. Sixteen per cent of the schools the volunteers work with are senior high schools. Ninety per cent of the volunteers' work is done in government schools and 10 per cent in non-government schools, so non-government schools benefit from the grant that is given, as well. I think there probably is a need for more schools in rural areas to be served by this program, and I am sure that demand will continue to grow in the years to come. We need to continually review the program to understand those demands because if we do not understand what the demands are, we cannot really assess the amount of funding required. A number of people mentioned that the School Volunteer Program has been replicated across Australia. It started in Western Australia in this way and other states have taken it up. As the member for Mandurah told us more than once, it is an award-winning program, and so it should be. It is a program that has served our community well and I know it will continue to do so.

The program initially targeted literacy but has expanded into areas, such as sport; the reverse mentoring, as I mentioned a moment ago, whereby young people are teaching their mentors or volunteers things such as computing skills; and in areas like career mentoring. It is very important, again, for young people to have contact with older people when they are thinking about their careers and where they might go in the future. The School Volunteer Program is a partnership with the Department of Education and Training that adds value and is a very valuable resource. However, I think it is also worth pointing out that the department in fact supports 50 organisations with grants and subsidies. The School Volunteer Program is not the only one. I would like to mention some of the others. In the last financial year Western Australian Council of State School Organisations received a grant of \$282 000; Dyslexia Speld Foundation, \$240 000; Gravity Discovery Centre, \$52 000; Safety

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House Association of Western Australia, a very important association again supporting schools, \$102 475; Merrilinga, an organisation involved with young people and one that we support, \$140 000; Fremantle Children's Literature Centre, \$241 000—these are not small amounts of money that are given to organisations that support young people and our schools; Blue-Earth, a physical education program, \$107 000; and Clontarf Football Academy, \$1.9 million. Support was also given to other organisations, such as the Law Society of Western Australia to support the Francis Burt Law Education Centre, an organisation of which I was on the board for many years, and I know that it valued the support it was given through the Department of Education and Training. These are some of the many organisations that support the work of the department and that the department in turn supports with financial grants. We need to remember that these are strong partnerships that go a long way to helping our young people.

I understand that the money for the School Volunteer Program goes to placing volunteers. They are the central part of the organisation and the funding assists with the recruitment of school volunteers, screening, working with children checks, and the training of and support for volunteers. It is a central coordinating organisation. Of course, resources are needed to assist the organisation to do that. Resources have been provided for 13 years. I understand that this organisation also has a partnership with the Department for Communities.

I met with two representatives from the organisation, Christine Gray and Marie Carmody, on 12 January this year and we went through aspects of the program. It was an excellent meeting. One of the issues raised at that meeting, and one raised by a number of members today, was the teacher who was last year placed in the organisation for only one year. It was understood by the organisation that it was to be a one-off placement for one year. The teacher was allocated to the organisation between July 2008 and June 2009. From the teacher's point of view it was a transition back into a classroom appointment. The School Volunteer Program was aware that it was a one-off, one-year allocation. Of course, it accepted it very gladly. When I met with Christine Gray and Marie Carmody, they recognised that it was a one-off, one-year appointment and I understand that they had no expectation that it would be continued. Of course, they would like it to be continued, but it was understood that it was a one-off placement. It is important to clarify that.

It is also important to note that funding has been available for 13 years. The funding that has been allocated for next year includes a consumer price index increase, which brings the total funding to \$280 000. I note that when the representatives of the organisation came to see me, they asked for a \$130 000 increase—a 32 per cent increase—that would bring the total funding to \$400 000 a year. It is a huge increase in percentage terms and one that the government and I were not prepared to entertain at that time. I repeat that the total funding to the School Volunteer Program for the next 12 months is \$280 000, which includes a CPI increase. The government will be reviewing the funding it allocates to all organisations, such as the organisations I listed. The School Volunteer Program has received funding from the department for 13 years. All members of this house and this Parliament would support that funding because they understand the value of the School Volunteer Program. While all organisations must be reviewed and reassessed, because that demonstrates that this government is being accountable to its taxpayers, we will continue to support an organisation such as this.

It appears to be an assumption that when the government says that an organisation will be reviewed, its funding will be cut. That is not necessarily the case. In reviewing an organisation's worth, the government might decide that it is doing such a good job that its funding should be increased, which is what happened under the former government. It is important that we review funding to organisations like this.

Mr P. Papalia: In this environment people are uncertain and that heightens their anxiety.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: Yes, but I point out to the house that the previous government had a three-year funding arrangement with the School Volunteer Program up to the middle of last year. It did not guarantee funding for a further four years; it granted the School Volunteer Program funding for only one year. I understand the reasons for that.

Mr D.A. Templeman: If I were the minister, I would give them funding for four years.

Dr E. CONSTABLE: If the member for Mandurah were the minister, he would give them funding for four years. This government will give the organisation \$280 000, which includes a CPI increase. The government states categorically that it will continue to support this organisation along with other organisations that continue to contribute so fully to our schools.

MR P. MILES (Wanneroo) [5.46 pm]: I support the government's position on the funding of the School Volunteer Program. I wish it had been available when I was attending school. Perhaps if it had been, my dyslexia would have been picked up earlier than it was. My daughter had the benefit of this program. She is now 21 and

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has a three-year-old son. My five-year-old son also has the benefit of this program at his school. It is a worthwhile program.

The minister acknowledged the worth of the program and agreed to continue the funding of \$280 000 for the next 12 months. The program will then be reviewed when funding to other non-government organisations is considered. Following the review the minister will make a decision about ongoing funding.

I will provide members with the details of the School Volunteer Program in my electorate. The SVP was, as members know, initiated over 12 years ago. Last year it operated in 253 schools and recruited and supported 1 800 volunteers who mentored approximately 2 000 students. The program focuses on supporting students in the early years of their education. The volunteers assist students who have been identified by school personnel and teachers as being most in need of individual support.

The SVP comprises many programs and I will refer to a couple of them. The computer links program is a six-week course in which high school students, under the guidance of their teachers, work with 15 to 20 participants, mostly senior, unemployed or low-income community members, and on a one-to-one basis teach the participants how to use a computer. This service is free to community participants and obviously gives the high school students much-needed support in the community.

Another program within SVP is career mentoring. This program operates similar to the core program, but over a specified 10-week period, and assists year 10 students with setting and investigating career goals and opportunities. A volunteer assists by being a role model and a mentor to help his or her chosen student to make informed choices about his or her education, training or employment.

Another one of the great services the SVP provides is the student community attendance monitoring program—SCAMP. Some of the names need to be revised, but the acronym SCAMP is pretty good. This program is excellent for some areas within my electorate. The SVP mentors ring the parents or guardians of the students who are truanting or are absent from school that day. The pilot program was carried out in a school in 2003, and resulted in a significant decrease in truancy. The telephone call gives parents and guardians the opportunity to inform the school of any underlying reason why their child might be skipping school, such as bullying or anything like that.

The SVP major outcomes are to improve life skills, self-esteem and self-concept through providing mentoring skills and literacy and numeracy support for selected children, primary and secondary, within Western Australian government schools. Currently, most schools in Western Australia, and throughout Australia, are finding that between 20 and 35 per cent of their students are classified as students at risk. This is a very high percentage, and it is due to many reasons, such as low literacy and numeracy levels and low self-esteem, and students coming from non-English-speaking families throughout the state. It is almost impossible for teachers to help these students on a regular one-on-one basis. The wonderful resource of volunteers from the community who act as mentors in schools helps to fulfil this role to make the next generation of adults better-prepared citizens of Australia. However, as Steve Dickson, the principal of one of the schools in my area, said to me in my electorate office, it is the volunteers themselves who make or break the program. It is quite possible for a school to have a bad experience with the program if it does not have the right people to do the job. To address this, SVP provides training programs for the volunteers, so that they can help the children and young adults understand and appreciate the need for ethical standards in the community, and the need to have an adequate education.

All volunteers who join the program are required to attend orientation training, which covers issues such as confidentiality, duty of care, commitment, working within school guidelines and, of course, security. In addition, volunteers are offered ongoing optional training and information workshops in other areas, such as respecting others, self-esteem, conflict resolution, handling emotions, effective listening and communication skills, suicide awareness—which is very important—reading made easy, drug awareness and others as the needs arise. The volunteers used by SVP really enjoy the challenge of helping the children who are in need of additional support, making them the perfect mentors for these children.

The adult volunteers truly enjoy the challenge of helping the children, and many younger volunteers are also helping struggling students in the program, as schools are grateful to receive one-on-one assistance from people across all generations. Currently, the youngest SVP volunteer is 16 years old, with the oldest mentor being 92, which is quite amazing. With the senior and retiree population increasing across Australia, a vast and largely underutilised resource of experienced, loving and caring community people with ongoing capabilities are available to contribute to society, and in particular to our adults of the future.

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In conclusion, the SVP provides a valuable service to many schools throughout Western Australia. I am pleased that the government has decided to continue the funding for this program whilst the review of all grants to non-government organisations is underway.

Amendment to Motion

Mr P. MILES: I move —

To delete all words after “house” with a view to inserting the following —

acknowledges the Liberal-National government’s commitment in funding and support to the School Volunteer Program, which does an excellent job supporting schools across Western Australia.

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [5.53 pm]: I will make a very brief comment. As the person who happened to be the education minister when the School Volunteer Program began, I am very pleased with the comments made in this house, and I am delighted to see the way in which the program has grown in numbers and, indeed, in reaching into schools and their students. As members have said, the program provides a great deal of literacy and numeracy support to the individual girl and boy, and it also provides, I imagine, for many children from perhaps split families or single-parent families, a mature adult to relate to, and that is supportive of those children and of the school.

As the minister said, the program is successful and well supported, and will continue to be supported by this government. Therefore, I congratulate the School Volunteer Program. However, as with every area of government expenditure, a government has to look at all the programs, and that has been undertaken by the minister. The Department of Education and Training sponsors a wide range of programs, and the total expenditure on those programs is being examined. However, this is a good program, and it will continue to be supported.

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef) [5.55 pm]: I thank the house for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I commend the member for Wanneroo on his amendment to the motion. I also commend him on his earlier comments, given that he may well represent the only electorate that does not have any schools that benefit from this program. I looked through the list, and I could not find any in his electorate. However, I have four schools in my seat, and they are Kinross Primary School, Kinross middle school or Kinross College, Ocean Reef Senior High School and Springfield Primary School. In the electorate of Ocean Reef, our local Lions Club has been a particularly strong partner of the School Volunteer Program. The club worked with the program to successfully nominate the group for one of those awards that the member for Mandurah mentioned in his speech.

As we have heard, the program has more than 1 800 mentors between the ages of 16 and 92. I highlight that they start at the age of 16. I think that a lot of the time we talk about the older mentors. The average age is about 50, but a lot of fantastic younger people get involved in this program and mentor those students who are even younger. In some ways, I guess there would be benefits in that, because they would be able to relate to the students with somewhat less of a generation gap. Having said that, there is no doubt that the older mentors bring a wealth of valuable experience to the program. The whole program works with approximately 3 500 students.

It is interesting that a lot of the earlier discussion on the motion focused on the one school liaison person and whether that appointment would continue. It probably should be pointed out—I do not think it has been yet—that the group itself operates as an independent, not-for-profit group, and it carries 15 staff of its own. When I received a copy of the submission to the minister, I noticed that there was no mention whatsoever of that school liaison person. I could be wrong, and I would welcome the minister’s advice on that. Is that correct?

Dr E. Constable: I am sorry; I did not hear the first part of what you said.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I believe that in the group’s submission to the minister in January, it did not mention that liaison position.

Dr E. Constable: I do not have a copy of it with me.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Okay. I looked through it, and I could not see any mention of it.

Originally when we were talking about supporting the School Volunteer Program, we heard during question time today that \$280 000 would be provided, which includes an increase, in line with the consumer price index, of about \$10 000. Similarly, the debate has perhaps unfairly focused on the Department of Education and Training and its partnership with this group. It is true that the department has the main carriage of this program, as it should, but we should also recognise today that the Department of Sport and Recreation also assists. I also

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noticed that when the member for Maylands mentioned that The Good Guys are quite a key sponsor of this group, there was no mention of the fact that LandCorp, which is the state government's developer, is also a strong financial supporter of the School Volunteer Program. In addition to financial support, LandCorp provides 40 of its employees to be involved in mentoring in the Midland area. Therefore, that is another area in which the state government is involved in this program. It provides support from three departments, not just from the Department of Education and Training, which is what we are focusing on today. The state government is clearly supporting this program from many different directions.

I completely agree with the last part of the original motion and with the last part of the amendment that has been moved. As the member for Wanneroo pointed out, 20 to 35 per cent of students are classified as students at educational risk. It is impossible for teachers to reach these students on a one-on-one basis, as they would need to be. This is where the wonderful resource of using volunteers from the community —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr V.A. Catania): Hansard is having a bit of trouble hearing what is being said. I am sure that everyone would like to have everything recorded correctly, so if members would have their conversations outside the chamber, it would be much appreciated.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will conclude my comments by saying that on the current population statistics and trends, it is anticipated that by 2025 there will be more seniors over the age of 65 than children under the age of 18 living in Australia. This is a fantastic example of a program that can engage people at both ends of the scale and get them talking and interacting together, for the benefit of both groups.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham) [5.59 pm]: I understand that the government has moved an amendment to the motion put by the opposition; therefore, I will speak to that briefly, not wishing to overly delay matters. I think the opposition explained its case well as to what it thinks should happen to the School Volunteer Program and the extent of support that should be provided. Members of the School Volunteer Program, some of whom are here in the gallery, understand the arguments that we have put and the support that we have provided to the program.

The amendment moved by a Liberal Party member, the member for Wanneroo, appears not to acknowledge what the opposition has put forward as an idea to this house. It also appears not to acknowledge at all the proposition the opposition put forward. Therefore, we can conclude from the amendment moved by members of the Liberal Party that they do not support the retention of staff for the School Volunteer Program and that they do not support the ongoing funding of the program. It is very plain that the Liberal Party does not support what the opposition says because the opposition said in its motion "guaranteed funding and retention of staff".

Dr E. Constable: You never did!

Mr M. MCGOWAN: We put that forward as an idea. The government is rejecting that. The 5 000 or 6 000 members of the School Volunteer Program, the 1 800 who are trained in mentoring every year and those thousands of children who are the beneficiaries of this program, need to know the Liberal Party does not support them having guaranteed funding, and that the Liberal Party does not support the organisation having proper staffing arrangements. That is plain from the amendment moved and now we all know where the Liberal Party stands in relation to this matter.

Amendment (deletion of words) put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (29)

Mr P. Abetz	Dr E. Constable	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr F.A. Alban	Mr M.J. Cowper	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr M.W. Sutherland
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr J.E. McGrath (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr I.M. Britza	Dr K.D. Hames	Ms A.R. Mitchell	
Mr T.R. Buswell	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Dr M.D. Nahan	
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mr A.P. Jacob	Mr C.C. Porter	

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Paul Miles; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Albert Jacob

Noes (22)

Ms L.L. Baker
Mr A.J. Carpenter
Mr V.A. Catania
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms J.M. Freeman
Mr W.J. Johnston

Mr J.C. Kobelke
Mr F.M. Logan
Mr M. McGowan
Mr M.P. Murray
Mr A.P. O’Gorman
Mr P. Papalia

Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mr E.S. Ripper
Mrs M.H. Roberts
Ms R. Saffioti
Mr C.J. Tallentire

Mr A.J. Waddell
Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.A. Templeman (*Teller*)

Amendment thus passed.

Amendment (insertion of words) put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (29)

Mr P. Abetz
Mr F.A. Alban
Mr C.J. Barnett
Mr I.C. Blayney
Mr J.J.M. Bowler
Mr I.M. Britza
Mr T.R. Buswell
Mr G.M. Castrilli

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Ms M.M. Quirk
Mr E.S. Ripper
Mrs M.H. Roberts
Ms R. Saffioti
Mr C.J. Tallentire

Mr A.J. Waddell
Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.A. Templeman (*Teller*)

Question thus passed.