

DESERT BLUE CONNECT

Statement

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [5.27 pm]: I rise to make a brief comment on an opening I attended recently, but while I am on my feet, I will express my support for the comments made by Hon Peter Foster and I thank him for that contribution. Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to attend the opening of the Women's Wellness Centre in Geraldton. On 8 March, the centre was officially launched and it is now up and running. The centre has been provided by an organisation in the midwest called Desert Blue Connect. For those who do not know, Desert Blue Connect is a community not-for-profit that provides counselling and support for people who have gone through the awful experience of family violence and sexual assault. It provides counselling, support and advocacy services for children. It provides crisis accommodation for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence. It also provides rural support and programs in the region across the midwest in places like Mingenew and Morawa and further afield. It also provides a men's community intervention program and a caring dads program.

Desert Blue Connect is an organisation that is quite close to my heart. I have been on the board of Desert Blue Connect for a few years now and I was given the great privilege of speaking to the group who attended the opening of the new Women's Wellness Centre and cutting the ribbon before invited guests were allowed inside to tour this amazing new facility. The great thing about this particular facility is that it has been developed to be a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for women addressing a range of women's needs in the midwest community. It provides bulk-billed medical services for women, counselling services, pregnancy counselling and support, the Looking After Mums program, a mums' group and a program called Desert Rose, which is a First Nations women resilience program. I will speak more about that in a moment.

I will speak about the early seed of the idea for the women's wellness program. It came from the staff on the ground at Desert Blue Connect. As members can appreciate, Desert Blue Connect staff members are incredibly busy delivering highly important work, which is also highly stressful work, in our community. Amongst all the busyness and the important work that they deliver for the people of the community, they had a seed of an idea to provide a tailored, specific women's wellness service for the midwest community, and they took the idea to the leadership of Desert Blue Connect. They researched facilities and buildings nearby where they could develop their own facility, and they kept advocating and made it easy for Desert Blue Connect, as an organisation, and the board to say yes to establishing this program. The work that they have collectively done to establish this facility, open it and have it up and running to provide that service to the community is a great credit to everybody involved. I thank the CEO of Desert Blue Connect, Russell Pratt, for listening very carefully to his staff, recognising the need for a service like this in the community and working collaboratively with the community, the board and all the various groups involved to help build, fit-out and provide the service. I know it was a lot of work for Russell and the Desert Blue Connect leadership to find doctors. It is a regional service, so doctors are always hard to find, and they put in many, many hours getting a female GP and then a substitute female GP when the new GP had to go on leave. It was a lot of work for them, but they persevered to make sure that the service was available to the community because they recognised how very important it is.

The tour of the facility was a wonderful experience because as one goes inside, one can see the love that has gone into creating that facility. It is warm. It is welcoming. It provides safe spaces. Each of the staff have their various rooms or spaces in the building. There is a space for children to play when their parents are getting treatment or counselling. Every space is designed to feel warm, safe and welcoming, and that is a particularly important consideration that shows the heart and soul of that organisation and the love it put into making sure that it shows that it really cares for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

I will speak briefly to the Desert Rose: First Nations Women's Resilience Program, and explain what that is about. As a member of the board of Desert Blue Connect, I had the privilege of listening to the creator of that program speak about the work that it delivers and why she created it. I will explain what Desert Rose is. Desert Rose is a culturally safe life-skills program specifically for First Nations women created by a First Nations woman. It is a four-week program for women and it takes them on a bit of a journey over a few consecutive Wednesday and Thursday afternoons to help them reconnect with their culture and each other, regain their cultural identity and create some inner healing and empowerment. It is an incredibly important program and one that is delivered by First Nations people for First Nations people. It has now been incorporated into the Women's Wellness Centre. I thought that I would mention it specifically today because another one of its programs is starting up on 3 May and applications are open now, so I will pop the link on my Facebook page for anyone who is interested.

Lastly, I will mention Desert Blue Connect's WAVE, or Walk Against Violence event. Every year, Desert Blue Connect gathers members of the community—a variety of Indigenous groups, the Geraldton police, some of the school groups and a whole different range of people from the community attend—and they listen to speeches about various people's services that are provided to support people who have experienced family and domestic violence. The participants then walk along the foreshore and down the main street of Geraldton, through the CBD. It is

a very quiet, peaceful walk through the community. In the most recent walk that I participated in, there was a really beautiful moment when we were walking along the foreshore. There were a lot of people out that day—it was a beautiful day—and groups of people broke out into spontaneous applause. That was a beautiful display of support for the people who participate in marches like that, for reasons that I probably do not need to elaborate on. It was really heartening to see that the message is seeping through, and they felt that support. It was definitely a goosebumps moment, and I have them right now! I thank Desert Blue Connect for doing that kind of thing for the community, for the work that it does in gently creating awareness, for the men’s intervention programs it has created to help people who are ready to acknowledge that they need help and support, and for the way it has embraced technology to help the community provide wraparound networks for people who are vulnerable to family and domestic violence, and who can then use those community support networks to intervene before the violence takes place. It is doing some fantastic work in that space as well.

I want to reiterate that I really thank Desert Blue Connect for the amazing work it does. Thank you to Russell Pratt and his team. I would love to name them all, but there are a lot of people doing amazing work there. Please know that the midwest community is incredibly grateful for the work that you do.