



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Wednesday, 20 February 2019

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Questions without notice
Building—reforms

MR COE: I have a question for the Minister for Building Quality Improvement. I refer to the previous minister's commitment, made in June 2016, to implement 42 building regulatory reforms by the end of 2017 and a 43rd reform by the end of 2017-18. Minister, how many of the reforms are operating as of today?

MR RAMSAY: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question and for the interest that sneaks through every now and then from the opposition in relation to building quality improvement. The ACT government is committed to following through on all of the matters. I will confirm if the number is not accurate, but my understanding is that there are approximately 14 in place at the moment, there will be a further round in place by the end of this financial year, and the remainder will be in place by the end of this parliamentary term. I will have further information and further announcements on that in the coming days and weeks.

MR COE: Minister, what has prevented the government from delivering the regulatory reforms promised by the Labor government?

MR RAMSAY: There have been a number of matters in this area that are quite dependent on cooperative work across the jurisdictions. One of the things that we know is that issues around building quality are not restricted to the ACT. In fact, that was one of the points of conversation when I was at the building ministers forum in Melbourne just over a week ago.

What has been acknowledged across the jurisdictions is that this is indeed an Australia-wide issue. We are working through a number of things together. A number of those reforms are dependent on national cooperation and therefore the precise timing of those does not—

Mr Coe: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question was specifically: why have you not implemented all these reforms as promised by your predecessor? And the reforms that I made mention of in the main question were the 42 regulatory reforms that were due by the end of 2017. I am not talking about the generality but the specific reforms that were promised to be delivered by 31 December 2017.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, resume your seat. Minister, in the time you have left, can you be specific to that point.

MR RAMSAY: Indeed. Thank you, Madam Speaker. A number of the reforms that we are working on in the regulatory reform policy work here are part of that national cooperative work and therefore do not sit simply within the responsibilities of the ACT government. Again, we are committed to working with those.

I note, for the opposition and for members here and the community beyond, that, in relation to a number of the areas that we are working on, the other jurisdictions have noted our leading work specifically in relation to the testing of builders—people who are seeking builders licences. In relation to the phoenix-ing situation that we have

here, within the bounds that a state or territory government can operate in, those jurisdictions—(*Time expired.*)

MR PARTON: Minister, how many more panels have to fall off buildings before this government gets serious about effective reforms in this space?

MR RAMSAY: This government is very serious about the reforms in this space. This is one of the reasons why there is now a specific portfolio responsibility for building quality improvement under the most recent portfolio arrangements. We are continuing to work through all the reforms that are there. We are continuing to work through the regulatory responses that we have.

I note, and I have drawn this to the attention of the Assembly before in previous answers, the work of the regulator—the registrar—and the rapid regulatory response team. This is significant work. I draw to people's attention the work over the past period from 1 July to 30 December. It demonstrates the government's seriousness about the ways that we would continue to work in this area.

There have been five notices of intention to issue a rectification order in that period of time; there have been one rectification order and 10 show-cause notices; there have been four controlled activity orders; there have been 34 demerit points; there have been nine directions to undertake building work; and there have been 13 stop work notices.

This government is very serious about not only rolling out its policy reform but also about ensuring that people who are building in this territory are qualified and are of the highest quality. I want to make very clear that if people are not of the quality that is needed in this territory, we do not want you in the industry.

Municipal services—nature strips

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Minister for City Services and relates to the draft nature strip guidelines. Minister, is there a timeline for the finalisation of the draft nature strip guidelines and, if so, what is it?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. Those guidelines are currently being finalised. I am looking forward to publishing them soon. I will take on notice the exact period in time in which they will be published.

MS LE COUTEUR: Assuming that this will be fairly soon, does the government have a plan to promote the guidelines?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question, and I will take that on notice as well.

Building—quality

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Building Quality Improvement and Minister for Business and Regulatory Services, but not so much gaming and racing. On 4 February the *Canberra Times* reported on serious concerns regarding the Elara

complex and others, including the Empire apartments, Forrest; Pulse apartments, Gungahlin; and Fox Place, Lyneham. The *Canberra Times* indicated reports prepared by a structural engineer highlighted very disturbing design and construction practice which posed a significant risk to residents' safety. Minister, why has your government's building policy allowed very disturbing design and construction practice which poses a significant risk to residents' safety?

MR RAMSAY: I thank the member for his question and note the undertone, again, of a scare campaign coming through. It is always good to be raising issues that might scare the broader community; that demonstrates the way the Canberra Liberals work.

I sympathise with the owners of Elara who have been affected by the issue. I am aware that in that particular case they have indicated that they are likely to appeal the decision that was made so I will be cautious in relation to that one. However, Access Canberra has taken strong regulatory enforcement steps in that particular case and in the case of other situations.

In that particular one strong regulatory actions were taken against the builder, the engineer and the developer. The enforcement action that Access Canberra took against the licensee were upheld by ACAT. The builder has had to surrender their licence and that builder will never build in the ACT again. Access Canberra has pursued the engineer through the Supreme Court resulting in the conditioning of every building certifiers' licence when relying on that engineer's advice. That was the first time a party outside the building licensing regime has had enforcement action taken against them. In 2016 the ACT government introduced measures preventing former licensees who have liquidated companies from being eligible to be relicensed in the ACT.

Ten years have passed. That builder is no longer licensed and the developer has been wound up, so no further action can be taken in that particular case as far as the regulation is concerned. However, I reiterate that we are very sympathetic toward those who have been affected and we are continuing to roll out strong, effective reforms to make sure that those people who are building in this territory are of the highest quality.

MR PARTON: Minister, how have you been responding to the reports, the letters and the complaints—which, surprisingly, are emanating not from scare campaign headquarters but from all over the city—that Access Canberra and other government agencies are receiving regarding faulty design or construction in relation to the property cited in the *Canberra Times* article?

MR RAMSAY: Mr Parton and members opposite would be aware that the regulator who oversees regulatory compliance in this matter is a statutorily independent officer, so it would be inappropriate for me to be directly intervening in any of the matters. I meet with Access Canberra weekly and receive advice on how things are being followed through. We have resourced Access Canberra with additional staff members in this area and have been involved in conversations that have led to the establishment of the rapid regulatory response team—

Ms Lawder: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat. Stop the clock. Point of order.

Ms Lawder: Standing order 114 says:

Questions may be put to a Minister relating to public affairs with which that Minister is officially connected ...

I would imagine that the minister is officially connected with the agencies mentioned in the question and that his saying that it is a different agency and that he is at arms-length to it is avoiding answering the question directly.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not believe so. He has made mention of additional resources, a rapid response team and other matters that went to “What are you doing to respond to these concerns?” Minister, you have the floor.

MR RAMSAY: Indeed. Having been asked what I was specifically doing, I was replying to what I had been specifically doing. I will continue to work with not only the regulator but also those advising in the area of policy and the policy regulatory updates. I meet with those every week and I am confident that we are continuing on with very strong reform in building quality here in the ACT.

MR COE: Minister, what specific actions are you taking, or are you ensuring that your government takes, to address the structural issues regarding 350 columns, 43 beams and 25 angles in the Elara building?

MR RAMSAY: Again, as I indicated in my answer to the previous question, and in regard to the matters in relation to the Elara complex, I am being cautious about what is said because I am aware that not only has there been a Federal Court matter, but the owners have indicated that they intend to appeal that matter. So I am cautious about that.

Mrs Dunne: It’s not before the courts. You don’t have to be cautious.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister has the floor.

MR RAMSAY: I am delighted to see that Mrs Dunne is not the Attorney-General, nor has she been the Attorney-General. I am not sure if she has gained a significant amount of experience from her time in government over her many years here. I will remain cautious about matters where there has been—

Mr Coe: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat.

Mr Coe: The specific question was: what actions are you taking about the 350 columns, 43 beams and 25 angles? He has given a lot of other commentary but he has not actually addressed the substance of that question.

MADAM SPEAKER: I believe he is constraining himself with a level of caution

about what he can comment on. But you do have 46 seconds left. Can you please continue, minister, if you can provide any direct response to that.

MR RAMSAY: Can I say again that that builder's licence has been surrendered. They will never build in the territory again. Ten years have passed and the builder is no longer licensed. The developer has been wound up. There is no ability for Access Canberra—

Mr Coe: A point of order. The specific question was about what you are doing to address the structural issues: not the company, not the building licence but the structural issues.

MADAM SPEAKER: I have asked the minister. I think he is responding, as he can, to that question. Minister, do you have anything further to add?

MR RAMSAY: Can I say again that there is no capacity in Access Canberra to respond further in relation to that matter.

Building—quality

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Building Quality Improvement. Minister, reports on the fears of Canberrans in relation to shoddy building quality continue to surface. The anxiety of affected owners caused by costly litigation, out-of-pocket expenses, uncertainty and despair is reaching crisis proportions. In many cases the lifelong savings of owners are jeopardised by poor building quality. Minister, what immediate steps will you take to stem any further emotional and financial damage being inflicted on property owners by poor quality building?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. It is an important question. I am happy to say that this government continues its action not only in terms of its regulatory oversight and its compliance. I again draw Ms Lawder's attention to the establishment of the rapid regulatory response team, which is able to ensure that inspectors, people who are well qualified, are able to attend to matters very quickly to see whether they can be resolved before a formal complaint is lodged or whether that can be escalated to a further matter. I notice that—

Ms Lawder: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question was about stemming further emotional and financial damage to those people who are already experiencing shoddy building, not about the steps to be put in place for future building. It is about those people who are already affected.

Mr Gentleman: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, the minister has been answering the question. Members can only ask the question once. Continually interrupting the minister when the minister is being relevant is disorderly. They keep repeating the question when they are only able to ask it once. It has been happening right through question time.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Gentleman. Ms Lawder's question was about what immediate steps are occurring. Minister, you had made reference to the rapid response team. You may add to that in the time you have left.

MR RAMSAY: For those people who have suffered when buildings are not of the quality that we would expect to have in the ACT and who therefore may be experiencing different forms of concern, whether emotional or other concerns, one of the things we want to be able to do is respond to those very quickly. That is why we established the rapid regulatory response team.

Mr Coe: What is the response?

MR RAMSAY: The response is to get people out when they notice that things are of a quality that they do not—*(Time expired.)*

MS LAWDER: Minister, what actions will you take to assist those people already affected by poor oversight of building quality?

MR RAMSAY: For those people who are already affected by a building that is not of the quality that we expect to have here in the ACT, the best thing that we can do for them is make it so that, as their complaints are raised, we get out to them very quickly with the people who can inspect and who can negotiate with them how it is that matters can be resolved. That is why we have established the rapid regulatory response team. That is why I will continue to work with Access Canberra to make sure that its resources are sufficient and are working very effectively for the people of Canberra.

MR PARTON: Minister, why is your government now saying that responsibility for improving building rests with the buyer and that it is now “a buyer awareness problem”?

MR RAMSAY: I do not know that I have ever used that particular term. What I would say is that we draw to people’s attention, and Access Canberra has drawn to people’s attention, the fact that when investing in any significant asset—obviously a person’s home is not only a financial asset but also an emotional asset—they take the highest quality advice. That is certainly one important part of the work there.

It is not the only part of the work and that is why this government is rolling out a range of areas of improvement in the building industry. In addition, one of the things that we are doing, as I have indicated before, is making sure that people who are building here in the ACT have the requisite knowledge, the requisite expertise and the requisite approach.

That is why we have introduced the class C licence testing and why we are rolling that out to class A and class B licences, so that all builders who are operating here in the ACT are of the highest quality. Part of that is clearly our responsibility. Part of that is clearly the builder’s responsibility. And getting the right advice is clearly part of the owner’s or purchaser’s responsibility.

National Multicultural Festival—feedback

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, can you update the Assembly on the Multicultural Festival held over the weekend?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question. As the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I am in the privileged position of having witnessed very closely one of this city's unique and most popular cultural events over the weekend. What I saw at the festival was Canberrans and those from across Australia and around the world proudly displaying their culture to the community. And the Canberra community came out in strength to support them and to celebrate our inclusive city, in very good weather over the three days of the festival.

This unique and important event once again brought together a mix of people and a mix of cultures, cuisines, ideas and experiences from around the world. The strong engagement of Canberra's multicultural community over the past 23 years continues to make this festival what it is: a community celebration of diversity in a harmonious, friendly atmosphere.

Entertainment was a central part of this year's festival once again. Christine Anu performed songs in her native language, bringing awareness of First Peoples' music and culture. Isaiah Firebrace drew thousands of people to see his lively performances on two stages. Our multilingual city was celebrated with a languages showcase for the first time at the festival, featuring poetry and song.

I see that once again the Canberra Liberals continue to interrupt me when I am discussing our important languages. I know that tomorrow is mother languages day. They continue to interrupt. This is the second week in a row that they are interrupting.

Mrs Jones: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, please, minister.

Mrs Jones: Madam Speaker, someone having a quiet chat on their own side should not be characterised—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, there is no point of order.

Mrs Jones: Should not be characterised by the member as interjections across the chamber.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, resume your seat. I have mentioned before that sometimes quiet conversations are allowed, but they can be disruptive.

Mrs Jones: It is not interjection, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Steel.

MR STEEL: Mrs Jones has just interrupted me again. Thank you very much. Visitors also greatly enjoyed—*(Time expired.)*

MS ORR: Minister, what feedback have you received regarding the success of the National Multicultural Festival?

MR STEEL: As I walked around the festival I saw firsthand thousands of Canberrans—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat please. Members, the minister was on his feet for fewer than 10 seconds and there were interruptions and interjections.

MR STEEL: They are proving my point, Madam Speaker. As I walked around the festival I saw firsthand thousands of Canberrans enjoying the cultural diversity that was on show over the three days, enjoying the 150 separate performances on six different stages and visiting the 145 embassy and information stalls. We were very pleased with how the festival went at the weekend and we were very happy with the crowd's behaviour. The festival is a wonderful celebration of cultural diversity and we were very pleased to see so many people enjoying the sights, sounds and tastes of our multicultural city.

Early estimates indicate that around 200,000 people attended the 23rd National Multicultural Festival. Feedback that we have received from people at the festival was that they really enjoyed the variety of entertainment and felt comfortable moving around on the footprint. People were friendly and happy, enjoying the wonderful performances and the variety of food and drinks on offer. It was great to see so many children and families enjoying the festival on Sunday, on Family Day. And ACT Health has provided feedback that they were also pleased with stallholders' food safety.

On behalf of the ACT government, I would like to thank the thousands of performers, stallholders, community groups, sponsors and volunteers who made the festival such a success this year and the festival visitors who came to enjoy and celebrate our inclusive city.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Kikkert, a supplementary.

Ms Cody: Seriously?

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Cody!

Ms Cody: Sorry, Madam Speaker.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what feedback of disappointment have you received from the Multicultural Festival?

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I wonder whether the member opposite was questioning your ruling.

MADAM SPEAKER: I have just had a quiet word with her and she has apologised for that interjection. Mrs Kikkert has the call.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what feedback of disappointment have you received from the Multicultural Festival?

MR STEEL: We are going out to the community to seek their feedback; we do that every year through a survey. We are expecting to hear of improvements that we can make to the festival. We make incremental improvements every year. I am very pleased that, as a result of our budget review announced last week, we have secured the future funding of the Multicultural Festival, which will fund not only ongoing staffing for the festival over the next three years but also enhancements to the festival, particularly as we lead up to the 25th anniversary of the festival in 2021.

Mr Coe: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order. Resume your seat, please.

Mr Coe: Mrs Kikkert's question specifically was: what feedback have you received? It was not about how you are going to receive it, when you receive it or how much money is going to future festivals. It was about what he has received by way of feedback about the weekend's festival.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Coe. He was talking about the feedback he had received in his substantive question as well. Can you continue in the time you have left, Mr Steel, about the feedback?

MR STEEL: As I mentioned, we received very positive feedback as a result of the festival concluding, and we look forward to further feedback being provided so that we can continue to enhance this fantastic community event. We look forward, with the extra funding, to making further enhancements as we continue to grow this festival and make sure that it remains in our community for many years to come.

Children and young people—care and protection

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. On 17 February the *Canberra Times* reported on a care and protection case in which the ACT Court of Appeal concluded:

We do not consider that the finding ... that the children were at risk ... was correct.

According to the same article the government fought this outcome for five years. Minister, I am fully aware that the details of this matter are privileged information, but my question to you is: did the ACT government accept the decision of the ACT Court of Appeal? Yes or no?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Kikkert for her question. The ACT government does not have an option but to accept a decision of the Court of Appeal. That matter, I understand, is being returned and is still under consideration. As Mrs Kikkert has noted, I am not able to comment on the detail of any particular case.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what specific steps are you taking as minister to scrutinise what exactly went wrong in this case and to prevent anything like it happening again?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have been briefed on these matters as they have come forward. I am being a little cautious because, as we know, I am not able to comment on any particular case. So I will say that I am assured by the directorate, as per the comments that were provided to the *Canberra Times*, that decisions by caseworkers are made in the context of professional supervision, approved by an independent application review panel and on advice provided by the Government Solicitor, and frequently with independent legal advice.

It is very important to note in respect of the way this particular case was reported that only the court can make a care and protection order. This decision is based on the evidence that is put before the court. This means that the court must satisfy itself that a child is in need of care and protection. It is not up to child and youth protection services to make a care and protection order. That is a matter for the courts.

The way this case has been reported would seem to indicate that some people consider that it is in fact a caseworker who can make a care and protection order. That is not the case. As you know, Madam Speaker, where caseworkers take emergency action, or where CYPS takes emergency action, it is taken as a last resort to ensure a child or young person's safety.

The ACT Children's Court has the jurisdiction. It is the appropriate forum to hear and make determinations on the evidence provided in relation to care matters. That evidence must be provided within two working days to the Children's Court after emergency action is taken. Any decision that is made regarding the need to ensure a child's immediate safety by removing them from current circumstances is subject to such an application.

MS LAWDER: Minister, is an expensive, drawn-out five-year legal battle against this government the only way to right incorrect decisions?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not think that is a correct characterisation of the case. The case was heard in full in 2014. The decision was handed down in 2018. Clearly matters have changed between 2014 and 2018. This is currently a matter of further review.

Children and young people—care and protection

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. According to lawyers and Legal Aid the ACT has the most restrictive legislation in the nation when it comes to releasing even anonymous details of child welfare matters. For example, the ACT family that recently won a five-year court battle against the ACT government cannot legally discuss their case in any detail even if they wish to, including what the Court of Appeal determined the government got wrong. Minister, why does the ACT government find it necessary to silence families in ways that other states and even the federal Family Court do not?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Hanson for his question. Again, there were some errors of fact in the reporting of this matter. All jurisdictions protect child protection information, including matters such as child concern reports. The

confidentiality of reporters making child concern reports is absolutely paramount in ensuring the confidence of the community at large to make reports of concerns about children.

My recollection is that this article indicated that the journalist was unable to get a copy of a child concern report. That is exactly the situation, as I understand it, that would apply in other jurisdictions. Their legislation is drafted in different ways, but all jurisdictions protect information in the child protection system to protect the interests of children and young people, and the system itself, to ensure that the confidentiality of reporters is maintained, ensuring the confidence of the community to make a report when they have a concern about the safety and wellbeing of children.

MR HANSON: Minister, who exactly is the law designed to protect when the law prevents a family revealing details of their interactions with this government, even when they wish to?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The primary people that the law is designed to protect are children and young people. The interests of children and young people are first and foremost throughout the Children and Young People Act.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what assurance do Canberrans have that these failures will ever be fully addressed and not repeated when the details of this government's policy failures cannot be known?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I completely reject the premise of Mrs Kikkert's question, but I would note that these matters have actually gone to court. It is the jurisdiction of the court to review decisions. When the Children's Court makes a decision about a care and protection order, that decision can be appealed to the Supreme Court; that matter can then go to a court of appeal, and it can be returned to the Children's Court. That is the way that we ensure that the decisions made by child and youth protection services and the views of child and youth protection services can be tested in a robust way.

I note that it is recognised within the system that intervening in a family's life in order to ensure a child's safety does impact on people's human rights. That is why there is comprehensive oversight in place which includes the Human Rights Commission, official visitors, the ACT Ombudsman and the Public Advocate, who can seek access to information held by child and youth protection services on such matters. Indeed when matters go to court the Public Advocate is informed of all such applications and has the power to intervene in proceedings. The child is also separately represented—separate from both their parents and child and youth protection services—to ensure that their best interests are paramount in the decisions of the court.

Children and young people—care and protection

MRS JONES: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. Minister, you have often noted that the increasing number of children in out of home care is not unique to the ACT. However, in stark contrast to New South Wales, the number of Canberra children in care has jumped 23 per cent since 2015. In Scotland, for example, there has been a reduction in numbers of “looked-after”

children for five consecutive years. Meanwhile the percentage of ACT kids in care who have been there for five or more consecutive years has grown from 37 to 41 per cent over the past five years. Minister, is it time to admit that, as reflected in outcomes, the government's current out of home care strategy does not match best practice either in Australia or overseas?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Jones for the question. It is indeed an interesting one. There are a number of factors that come into play here. Mrs Jones reflected on the fact that there has been an increase in the number of children who are in care for an extended period of time.

The first objective of A step up for our kids is to intervene and provide support early to ensure that children can stay safe at home with their families or be returned to their families where possible. But the second objective, where that is not possible, is that children and young people in out of home care receive a secure, loving, permanent home. One of the outcomes of ensuring that children stay in the system and do not bounce in and out of child protection—that, if they are not able to be returned safely to their families, they have a secure, loving home—is that children will stay in the out of home care system until they are 18 years old, unless they are adopted. They will be counted in those numbers.

So, yes, there is a complexity in this system. Our early intervention supports through Uniting Children and Families is having an impact on restoring children to their birth families and seeing them united. We have implemented family group conferencing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, which has seen families make their own decisions, understand their challenges and keep children safe at home. We are starting to see the impacts of those policies. But this takes time. We are 2½ years into a five-year strategy. It will take time.

MRS JONES: Minister, what precisely is the ACT government doing to increase adoption for those who cannot go back to their families?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Jones for her supplementary question. Of course we had a task force on the timeliness of the adoption processes and we have made some changes in relation to providing better information for potential adoptive families and for birth families around adoption processes in response to that.

In addition, one of the findings of that task force was that additional resources would help to deliver more adoption outcomes and permanency outcomes. I think it is really important to emphasise that we are also talking about ensuring parental responsibility orders which provide permanency. As a result, the 2018-19 budget invested \$3.46 million over four years to continue to support an increase in permanency for children and young people where restoration to their birth family is not possible, through either an enduring responsibility order or through adoption.

We also have a discussion paper out at the moment in response to another one of the recommendations from that report around the process of dispensing with parental consent. I must emphasise, because this has also been the subject of media reporting recently, that this is about improving the timeliness and the process for adoption. This is not about increasing the number of children who are available for adoption or

dispensing with parental consent willy-nilly. This is about ensuring that the process reflects the best interests of children and young people.

Adoption is a very serious decision that affects the legal identity of children and young people. It affects the human rights of parents and it is absolutely critical that our processes reflect those very important factors.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, why has the ACT government not committed to a two-year maximum in out of home care as the New South Wales government has?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The New South Wales government has absolutely not committed to a two-year maximum in out of home care.

ACT Fire & Rescue—equipment

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, what technology has the ACT government invested in this summer to prepare for bushfires?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Cody for her interest in and support for our emergency services and safety for the ACT. Before I go into detail, I want to begin by giving my thanks to all of the hardworking personnel and volunteers from the ESA and parks and conservation who have been responding to the storm and bushfire season, and I thank their families for supporting them. They do an incredible job, and they are dedicated and passionate.

The government is investing in our front-line services as our city grows. The investment is being made in partnership with those who keep our city safe. I am proud that we have been able to roll out for the first time cutting edge specialist intelligence gathering—SIG—capabilities. This allows for live video streaming and spatial data collection of fires. A new infra-red camera will provide critical fire line and hot spot information in real time.

The recent Tidbinbilla and Mount Gingera fires were spotted by the SIG helicopter, enabling a speedy response. Without this new capability, these fires may not have been detected until the next day, when they were much larger. The real-time mapping and intelligence were used during the recent Corin fire to quickly identify areas for staging and refuelling to assist ground crews arriving at the remote location.

MS CODY: Minister, does this new investment extend to new equipment?

MR GENTLEMAN: With the help of the government, the ACT Rural Fire Service have taken steps to improve the safety of their members through the allocation of new personal protective clothing, PPC, that will update the 10-year old design and material. The contemporary PPC is lighter, better fitting and more suitable for a diverse volunteer workforce; offers superior fire protection and greater washability; and reduces heat stress.

Last week saw the start of a service-wide rollout of the new fire ground shirts, jackets and pants. The fire ground shirt is a new initiative for the ACT Rural Fire Service that

will provide greater versatility when conducting fire ground operations. ACTRFS members can remove their PPC jacket, which reduces their exposure to heat stress associated with wearing the full PPC.

The government, through the midyear budget, is making a \$2.3 million investment in firefighters from ACT Fire & Rescue to roll out the next generation of structural firefighting protective clothing. This is in addition to the \$270,000 delivery of new structural firefighting helmets previously announced in the 2018-19 budget. The new PPC and helmets will ensure that ACT Fire & Rescue firefighters will be well protected from injury while carrying out their important and sometimes dangerous work.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what other technology is the ACT government rolling out to keep our city safe?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Cheyne for her interest in safety across Canberra. In December we launched the ACT's first fire-bombing air base. The air base can be used to immediately fill large air tankers with mixed fire retardant or gel, depending on firefighting requirements. The NSW government has contracted four large air tankers, and the commissioning of this air base is another significant initiative in place to ensure that the ACT and NSW are bushfire ready. It also shows how we work across governments to respond in emergencies. These are just some of new initiatives within the emergency services areas that are helping to keep our city safe.

The \$975,000 commitment in this year's budget to upgrade the public safety CCTV network has commenced, with cameras being upgraded to the latest digital high definition model. I can also advise that a new CCTV camera has been installed along the pedestrian pathway in Haig Park. This camera is the latest model, with four lenses that provide 360-degree high definition coverage that will allow the camera to see in total darkness between the trees. I am informed that, since 2018, ACT Policing has used recorded footage on 298 occasions to record crime. The government is also utilising solar-powered CCTV cameras.

Children and young people—care and protection

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. Minister, in a recent answer to a question regarding why you had not declared a therapeutic protection place in the ACT you stated that confining a child in such a place does not align with best practice. You also assured the Assembly that support is provided in the most evidence-based way it possibly can be. Is repeatedly confining a sub-teen girl in the youth detention centre for extended periods of time a better example of best practice than providing a place of therapeutic protection?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for the question. I want to assure members of the Assembly that when children and young people are in Bimberi they are not confined in segregation other than as an absolute last resort to respond to a behavioural issue. The therapeutic protection place that is envisaged in the act—I was looking at the provisions only yesterday—is a place of confinement. A child or young person would go to a therapeutic protection place under a therapeutic protection order. Under the act the director-general can seek a therapeutic protection order if they

believe that they have tried every other less restrictive practice to support a child or young person who has difficult and complex behaviours.

Given the way the act is written, my reading of it is that it would be a response from the court to a request from the director-general for a therapeutic protection order. The view of the director-general and the view of the directorate is that a therapeutic protection order in the way it is currently written would not comply with our understanding of best practice responses and trauma-informed therapeutic responses to children and young people who have experienced complex trauma as a result of adverse childhood experiences.

MRS DUNNE: Noting that the minister did not answer that question, minister, is allowing a young child to bounce between detention and being put in places where she assaults her carers really the most evidence-based support that this government can provide to this child at this point in time?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I said in response to the question previously, and I thank Mrs Dunne for the supplementary, this work is complex and difficult. I have acknowledged in previous answers that a child's progress to recover from complex trauma will often be a case of two steps forward and one step back as the effectiveness of different therapeutic interventions and supports changes over time.

I want to commend all those who work in therapeutic care teams to provide support to very difficult and complex children with very difficult behaviours, 24 hours a day seven days a week. I can assure the Assembly and I can assure the Canberra community that these young people are receiving wraparound support from child and youth protection services, where they are in care, from Act Together, from therapeutic teams, and from Premier Youthworks where that is relevant.

But yes, some young people commit assaults. And yes, some young people, as a result, will end up in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. When they are in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, they are not confined in segregation other than as a last resort response to behaviours within the centre. They have access to education. They have a school there, in fact, as members opposite would be aware. They have access to other young people. Indeed, as I mentioned in my response to the question last week, the newspaper article noted that the young person in question had specifically said that that was one of the things that they appreciated.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what is stopping the ACT government from providing a purpose-built trauma-informed residential care home like the one you visited in Scotland in December, even if only as a temporary measure?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mrs Kikkert, could you repeat the question, please?

MRS KIKKERT: I am happy to. What is stopping the ACT government from providing a purpose-built trauma-informed residential care home like the one you visited in Scotland in December, even if only as a temporary measure?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The home I visited in Scotland was a residential care home. It provided trauma-informed therapeutic responses to young people in out of home

care, in the same way that our residential care homes here in the ACT provide therapeutic trauma-informed responses to children and young people who are in out of home care. It was a different design. It was an interesting model. Our model tends not to have six young people living together. We have moved away from having that number of young people living together. It was an interesting model. It is something that we might want to consider. But our practice is different. That is why we go on these trips, to learn from and to see what other people are doing. But I can absolutely assure the chamber that Premier Youthworks and ACT Together, in partnership with the Australian Childhood Foundation, are providing a therapeutic trauma-informed response to young people in residential care.

Government—assistance for veterans and seniors

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Seniors and Veterans. Can the minister update the Assembly on the recent grants rounds for seniors and veterans?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. I am delighted to update the Assembly on the recent grants rounds. I was pleased recently to launch this year's veterans and seniors grants as two separate and distinct rounds. That means they have had double the funding this year from the previous year. That is a demonstration of the government's commitment to supporting those who are building the social inclusion and community participation of Canberra's older residents and of those who have served in the ADF and their families.

We received a large number of applications across those two grants programs. This included traditional ex-service organisations such as the RSL and the Vietnam veterans federation, cultural organisations, legal aid and advocacy organisations, and a number of arts organisations. I am happy to announce that \$74,500 was provided in seniors grants and just under \$62,500 in veterans grants across 20 recipients.

There is more good news with this government. We have even more money that we are able to provide for community organisations now in grants of up to \$2,000. They will be available for the rest of the financial year. I encourage all organisations who provide services to seniors or to veterans and their families to take a look at the CSD website to see if they are eligible for funding. We have already been speaking to many organisations who may well be able to benefit from those grants and we encourage all relevant organisations to apply.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, can you advise the Assembly of what kinds of programs were funded in the seniors grants round?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary question. We have been able to provide funding to a wide variety of organisations providing programs to our seniors. We have provided \$10,000 to ADACAS for their elder abuse and safeguard project, which helps counter elder abuse through individual advocacy and targeted community education in places such as residential aged care facilities.

Legal Aid has been provided with \$6,000 to undertake consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to determine what resources can best support them to deal with elder abuse. We have provided \$2,000 to the ACT Chinese

Women Cultural Association to educate seniors on how to prevent dementia. There is \$10,000 for sanctuary Pacific Islands heritage for their “weaving stories from the Pacific Islands” program.

Canberra Seniors Centre has received over \$7,500 for the Latin lines program, which promotes coordination, balance, flexibility and socialisation through movement and dance. Seniors will also be able to get tips on cooking and nutrition, as well as try new cooking methods and adaptive kitchen aids through the \$5,800 we have provided to Nutrition Australia for their “simple eats for seniors—new ways for old faves” program.

Woden Seniors and COTA received around \$2,000 and \$6,000 respectively for programs to help bring seniors together to develop not only their gardening skills but also their sense of community. Madam Speaker, these are just a few of the recipients of this round. I congratulate each and every organisation and thank them for their dedication to a stronger Canberra.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, can you advise the Assembly of some of the organisations who receive funding in the veterans grants round?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. The veterans grants round this year was the first time that the government has run a dedicated round catering for groups that support veterans. I was pleased to see such a diverse group of applicants granted funding.

The Cuppacumbalong Foundation received \$10,000 for their veterans family blacksmithing course which brings current serving members and their children together to learn a new skill and to reconnect, forging new relationships, if you will. The Vietnam veterans and the veterans federation received \$8,500 to establish family days to help bring in veterans and their families to show what services are available. RSL Woden Sub-branch received just over \$4,000 to update their technical equipment for the Eddison Day Club.

Some of the grants specifically provide opportunities for veterans to upskill both in work skills and in promoting positive mental health, with over \$8,500 given to the ex-defence integration team for their five-day intensive course helping veterans to transition to a new career, and \$10,000 to Lifeline Canberra for their road to mental readiness course which aims to equip people for conversations around mental health and suicide. Soldier On has received \$4,000 to fund their veterans rowing program with the Canberra Rowing Club to help veterans remain fit and active and act as an introduction to rowing.

These are just some of the applicants who received funding in this round. Again, can I remind everyone present that both rounds still have funds available for grants up to \$2,000. I encourage everyone who has an idea that could help seniors or veterans in our community to put those ideas forward for consideration.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—out of home care

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for youth and children. The last

Productivity Commission report states that the ACT has the highest rate of Indigenous children in out of home care with the figure doubling since 2008-09 and that we have the highest rate of child protection reports for Indigenous children. Minister, can you explain why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Canberra are four times more likely to end up the subject of a child protection report, and what is the government doing to address this issue?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. Of course the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection reporting and engagement with the child protection system and out of home care is a national challenge. I recognise that the ACT figures, like the national figures, are unacceptable. That is why I announced in June 2017 a review into the circumstances of each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and young person involved in the child protection system, including those in out of home care.

The Our Booris, Our Way review has a focus on systemic improvements needed to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care, to improve their experience and outcomes while in care and, where appropriate, to exit children from care. Members will be aware that an interim report was released on 31 August and a final report is due in late 2019.

In keeping with the iterative nature of the review, the directorate has received interim recommendations which include themes in the areas of cultural proficiency of child and youth protection staff, implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principles within policy and practice, and access to family group conferencing for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families within the statutory system.

As I mentioned in response to an earlier question we have implemented a family group conferencing program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and I understand that that is having very good success in enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to understand their own challenges and to find their own solutions to keeping children safe at home, where they can, or in their broader kinship networks. We have committed funding in the budget to extend that. We have also committed funding in the budget review for some additional early responses to the Our Booris, Our Way review.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why have you allowed the rates of Indigenous children in out of home care to double under your watch?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not convinced that the premise of the question is right. I do not think that in the past two years the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care have doubled in the ACT. However, taking the premise of your question in good faith, I have already said some things about what we are doing to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can stay with their birth families, where it is safe to do so, or with their extended families. I would note that the ACT has the second highest rate in the country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living with kin, rather than in foster care.

In addition to our family group conferencing investment of \$1.43 million in the

2018-19 budget and our investment in the budget review in the initial implementation of Our Booris, Our Way, we are also supporting Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, in partnership with OzChild, to undertake a 12-month trial of functional family therapy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families at risk of ongoing involvement in the child protection system. The aim of the trial is to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering or remaining in out of home care through interventions that strengthen families and communities.

I would also note that some of the policies implemented under A step up for our kids that I spoke about earlier—Uniting Children and Families, as well as Melaleuca Place, a therapeutic response to children and young people, and the Red Cross birth family advocacy service—are having very good outcomes in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and families as well. So there is a suite of measures. There is no one-size-fits-all. There is no silver bullet. We are working very hard to address this issue.

MRS KIKKERT: Why should Canberrans believe, after 18 years of Labor government, that you have the solutions to improve the lives of Indigenous children in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This government believes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the solutions to the challenges in their community. That is why Our Booris, Our Way is led by a wholly Aboriginal steering committee, and it will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that lead the way in providing the answers to this very challenging—nationally challenging—issue of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in our out of home care system, something that is entirely unacceptable, something that we are working very hard to address.

Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, the number of children and young people in out of home care is not going to go down overnight. We already have a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care in stable placements, sixty per cent of them living with extended family and kin. We are not about to disrupt those placements. Those children and young people will probably remain in out of home care until they turn 18.

We are going to do some more work on finding where we can return young people to their families, but the numbers themselves are not going to go down overnight. What we need to do is intervene early, provide early support to families to ensure that we see fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families coming into contact with the child protection system in the first place—something that I note is not necessarily the responsibility of the child protection system—and then, when they do come into contact, work with families to understand how to keep their children safe at home.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—out of home care

MR WALL: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. Minister, the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner has stated

that there is still a lot of work to be done to make a difference in the statistics on Aboriginal children in care and that what is being done does not seem to be affecting the rates. The government is now halfway through a five-year strategy to improve the system, and interim recommendations from *Our Booris, Our Way* were received months ago. Minister, why are Indigenous children in Canberra 13.9 times more likely to be removed from their homes and put into care than non-Indigenous children in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Wall for the question. I will go directly to the question that he asked. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families often experience intergenerational trauma as a result of colonisation. This leads to increased rates of family and domestic violence, increased rates of mental illness and less likelihood of seeking help for mental health challenges, and greater rates of drug and alcohol abuse. Those three issues are the primary drivers of children and young people entering out of home care and child protection systems across the community.

We as a community need to understand the impact of intergenerational trauma, to understand the impact of past policies and practices and to understand that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions are what is really going to effect, at the end of the day, a significant reduction in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people coming into contact with the child protection system in the first place—stronger families, stronger parents, better access to services across the board, and services that are Indigenous led.

Mr Wall asked a question to which there are a lot of very complicated answers. But we are seeking, through *Our Booris, Our Way*, a wholly Aboriginal-led review, to better understand the drivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people coming into contact with the child protection system and to address those drivers.

MR WALL: Minister, why should the local Indigenous community have faith in your ability to make effective change when key stakeholders within Indigenous communities have voiced their concern at the direction the government is heading?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again I thank Mr Wall for his supplementary. The Community Services Directorate and I, and directorates and ministers across government, work very closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders and particularly the leaders of the main Aboriginal community controlled organisations, Winnunga Nimmityjah and Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation.

Of course they stand up for the community. Of course they fight for the people that they serve every day, as I would expect them to. Of course they hold us to account, as does the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. Of course they want us to do more, and more quickly. And that is why we have established the review but it is also why, in establishing the *Our Booris, Our Way* review, we very clearly sought interim reports and recommendations and responded to those. Work has already commenced to progress improvements in some of the areas that *Our Booris, Our Way* has identified.

Immediate initiatives include the development of a designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practice leader position within child and youth protection services, which will have a key role in supporting embedding the SNAICC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protection principles; continued support for staff to undertake the child and youth protection services cultural development program which is designed to provide staff with a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and have a strong focus on collaboration and establishment of positive working relationships both with families and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; engagement of SNAICC to undertake training for staff on the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principles and the development of a practice guide for staff on the implementation of the practice principles.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why are the outcomes for Indigenous children and families getting worse under your government here in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, I am not sure I would accept the premise of Mr Milligan's question. We are the only jurisdiction in the closing the gap report that is on track to deliver three of the targets—still not good enough but the only one that is on track to deliver three targets. They relate to children and young people. We are working very hard with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to trial and to implement new measures.

While I am on my feet and have the opportunity, I would also note that cultural change is really important in this space. We are not going to deliver the changes we need to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait and Islander people and communities without better understanding their experiences. So last year the Community Services Directorate held three showings of the *After the apology* film, a film that features four Aboriginal grandmothers and their experiences with the child protection system.

Five hundred CSD staff, if I remember correctly, attended the film and held conversations among themselves—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, that is very funny—about the impact of the film on them, reflecting on their practice, reflecting on how the decisions they make affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and grandmothers. It was a really powerful experience.

It is only through this kind of engagement in cultural reform across the workforce that we will deliver real change in the way that we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families rather than doing to or for them. Enabling us to work in a restorative way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families will make a significant difference in this space, but it will not happen overnight.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—out of home care

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. Minister, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in our community are

13.9 times more likely to be removed from homes than other children. Minister, why is your government continuing to fail Indigenous children in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Burch for her question. I am not sure that I can add much to my previous answers. As I have said previously, the numbers we see today are unacceptable. That is why we are investing in change. That is why we have established a wholly Aboriginal-led review that is looking at the circumstances of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person in the child protection and out of home care system.

We are looking at systemic change and we are reviewing the cases of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child in the system. We are working with Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver new programs and new services, like functional family therapy and family group conferencing. We are learning the lessons from other jurisdictions. We had the leading players from VACCA, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, a community controlled organisation, working with us, to better understand how they work.

One of the key recommendations that I received in December—and I have certainly discussed this with the chair of the Our Booris, Our Way committee—is the fact that we do not have an Aboriginal community controlled child welfare organisation in the ACT. We cannot hand over responsibility and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to deliver services when that organisation does not exist. We are very keen to work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, to work with existing community controlled organisations, to develop more capability by Aboriginal-led organisations and Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and for them to work with us to address this significant national challenge. (*Time expired.*)

MISS C BURCH: Minister, as observed by the Our Booris, Our Way chair, the existing programs and systems are just not working for Aboriginal families. What are you doing right now to fix this?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am afraid that at this point I am going to have to refer Miss Burch to my previous answers.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what is your response to the observation from the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner that what is being done does not seem to be affecting the rates of children in care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have probably the same answer to Mr Milligan: I refer him to my fairly comprehensive previous answers. But I also note that, as I said previously, the absolute numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care are unlikely to fall dramatically in the short term because 60 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care are in kinship care placements. Where they are in stable placements they are likely to stay there, so they are likely to stay in the out of home care system. They are safe and they are well—I hope they are well; I do not speak for every single one of them. They are safe in their kinship care placements, and we do everything we can to support our kinship carers to provide safe, loving, nurturing homes for children in care.

ACT Youth Week—youth empowerment

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. Minister, ACT Youth Week will be held from 12 to 21 April. How is the government empowering and supporting young people to make this year's Youth Week a success?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question and his interest in Youth Week. Each year the government supports events and activities during Youth Week through the Youth Week grants program. Last week, I was pleased to announce the successful recipients of this year's grants. The grants were awarded to support activities that promote inclusion and celebrate the diversity of young Canberrans.

Among the successful applicants are the Sunset Festival, which will see a number of youth engagement services from across the ACT collaborating to provide a fun afternoon in celebration of Youth Week. The event will have live music, DJs, food, skating and street art demonstrations, sports activities and prizes. The event will be an opportunity for youth services to provide important information directly to young people in a safe and comfortable setting and will provide young people from across the ACT with an opportunity to engage in a number of fun activities that they may not otherwise have access to.

The AIDS Action Council's encampment program organises camps for young LGBTIQ-identifying people and facilitates activities that allow the participants to explore and discuss relationships, histories and health in a fun and non-judgemental setting. Encampment is entirely youth led, being organised and facilitated by a group of LGBTIQ and questioning volunteer mentors aged between 18 and 25 years.

Members who are fans of the humans of New York photography project may be very interested to hear that this Youth Week will feature our very own humans of Tuggeranong photography exhibition, which will include photography of young people taken during a workshop organised by YWCA Canberra Clubhouse.

These are just some of the brilliant youth-led initiatives that will be realised for this year's Youth Week and that the government is proud to support through the Youth InteractACT Youth Week grants program.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how does the government help the community celebrate the individual achievements of young Canberrans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for his supplementary question. The government is currently seeking nominations for this year's Young Canberra Citizen of the Year awards, which will launch Youth Week.

As members would be aware, these awards recognise the achievements of young Canberrans between the ages of 12 and 25 across six categories: the Young Canberra Citizen of the Year award, which celebrates a young person who is an exceptional role model, a champion of youth issues or an active community leader; the personal achievement award, which recognises a young person who has demonstrated

exceptional commitment to overcome obstacles and adversity in pursuit of their goals; the individual community service award, which recognises the direct contributions made to the community by a stand-out young person; the environment and sustainability award, which recognises the role of a young person or a group of young people in contributing to Canberra's ongoing mission to be a cleaner, greener, more sustainable city; the arts and multimedia award, which recognises the contribution by young people to the arts; and the group achievement award, which recognises a group or organisation that has come together to champion the values of young people.

Each of these awards represents an opportunity for the government to highlight the unique ways in which young people contribute to our community and the incredible things they are capable of achieving. The awards provide a platform for the promotion of positive stories to inspire all young Canberrans and create role models for our young people to look up to. Everyone in this place will be familiar with some of the past winners of these awards, such as Jasiri Australia, Mustafa Ehsan, Jordan Kerr and of course the outgoing Young Canberra Citizen of the Year, the amazing Dhani Gilbert.

Nominations for the awards are open now and will close on 18 March. I hope anyone here and anyone who is listening who knows an inspiring individual or group of young people will consider nominating them for an award.

MS ORR: Minister, how does the government ensure that it is hearing the voices of young people on policy that affects them?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. Members may remember that late last year in this very chamber the government's ACT Youth Advisory Council, in partnership with the Youth InterACT team, held a milestone engagement with Canberra's young people in the form of an ACT Youth Assembly.

The ACT Youth Assembly was a deliberative democracy process that brought together young people from across the ACT to consider and consult on four key topics: civic participation, youth mental health, youth homelessness, and equality and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

One hundred and sixteen young people from diverse backgrounds, ages and life experiences explored creative solutions to each of the issues through group work and discussions. Through this process, the Youth Assembly developed and endorsed 29 recommendations, which were presented to me and to the Children and Young People Commissioner in the final session of the day.

The ACT Youth Advisory Council has recently released its report on the outcomes of the ACT Youth Assembly. The report is an invaluable insight into the views and experiences of young Canberrans. I look forward to working with my colleagues in developing the government's response to the report's recommendations. The government also continues to engage with young people through the ACT Youth Advisory Council and across relevant consultations.

Madam Speaker, given the tenor of the previous questions, I also want to note that the ACT government engages closely with children and young people in the out of home

care system, facilitated by CREATE. We have had a number of meetings with CREATE's young consultants. Late last year we held a forum with the young consultants to talk about their experiences in the out of home care system. They presented at the end of the day their views and their recommendations to me, to the executive director of children, youth and families and to other members of the broader community that make up the child protection system.

This is a government that listens to young people. We hear that young people care about the future of their environment, about clean energy and about being supported to express their identity. We hear that young people want to feel safe. We will keep listening.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, further questions can be placed on the notice paper.