

BAPTIST COMMUNITY SERVICES**31 May 2006**

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: Baptist Community Services (SA) Inc. (formerly known as WestCare) has been a welfare arm of the Baptist churches across South Australia for over 90 years. BCS provides a wide range of services to people who are disadvantaged, marginalised and homeless across the aged, gender and cultural spectrum. Noteworthy services include the provision of food and a place of support during the Depression years; welcoming assistance in a variety of ways to migrant ethnic groups in the post-war years; and a homely and supportive environment for those who have been marginalised in general.

In recent years the breadth and scope of services provided by BCS has grown to include the provision of meals, emergency assistance, accommodation, counselling, respite care, mental health services, adventure services, indigenous services, refugee services, youth services, and training and employment assistance to the disadvantaged, marginalised and homeless individuals and families. BCS is now a significant provider of community services and community development initiatives across metropolitan and regional South Australia. Specific programs currently running through the BCS program include mental health services, indigenous services and youth care, and I would like to comment on each of those.

First, the types of mental health services offered include individualised support packages (with a focus on recovery, rehabilitation and community living), accommodation services, social support programs, recreational programs, and training and development of peer workers. Of the \$22 million of one-off expenditure into the community mental health scheme in 2005, BCS received non-recurrent funding of approximately \$1.4 million. This has been earmarked to provide individualised support packages and run a project to train and recruit peer workers involved in the industry.

However, BCS has more areas of need that require further funding, including increased funding to assist people to live in the community without reducing funds for necessary acute services; the development of a system which is funded to offer ongoing support for people with mental health issues to live in the community; improved access to psychological and rehabilitation programs; and increased appropriate public and supportive housing.

Secondly, the BCS indigenous services comprise various programs supported by indigenous staff. Those services can include the Karpandi Women's Day Care Centre; emotional, social and practical support for indigenous people; advocacy; mothers' groups; counselling; art and craft programs; cultural camps for elders, men and young women; health services; and referral to other appropriate services. It is quite comprehensive.

The indigenous services are tailored around client needs. These may include personal development, support programs and wellbeing services. It is apparent that there are many issues that face indigenous people who receive services through BCS, and that is something they genuinely need. Ultimately, to focus on any one issue does not acknowledge the complex nature of this marginalised group situation. For example, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, poverty, mental health problems, and other difficulties accessing accommodation and employment are some of the common issues that BCS observe daily in the life of those who use their services. Employment of indigenous staff at BCS at the coalface is extremely important to ensure an equitable service to indigenous clients. In terms of BCS involvement in youth care, they provide a diverse range of integrated youth services which assist young people who are experiencing disadvantage and homelessness.

These services address client needs from different perspectives and may deal with prevention, crisis intervention, case managed accommodation and support and complete packages of care tailored specifically for individuals right around South Australia. While issues are tackled at different levels, the client groups generally include young people's experience of multiple and complex support needs. Programs are aimed at servicing these needs and include education

and hands on training for young people, whilst providing opportunities to build confidence and self-esteem.

Baptist Community Services faces many challenges, including the need to identify, recruit and train more carers to assist in supporting disadvantaged people. It feels it is important to harness community capacity and resources to take reasonable but greater ownership and responsibility for solutions to homelessness and the disadvantaged in our society. A government is judged by how it looks after those most disadvantaged and requiring genuine help in our society. One would hope that the state government continues to provide funds for Baptist Community Services and in that way it can continue its terrific work in the community.