



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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Private Members' Statements

10 April 2018

WALLSEND BAPTISTCARE COMMUNITY CENTRE

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (12: 16):

The Wallsend BaptistCare Community Centre has served the disadvantaged residents of Wallsend for seven years. I sat down with the Centre Manager, Craig Budden, to talk about what the centre provides and its needs as an organisation. According to Craig, the primary issues faced by those who use the centre are domestic and family violence and homelessness, along with a host of accompanying issues including substance abuse and mental health problems. The centre includes a food bank, which is open to everyone. It offers a range of groceries to all in need, as well as being a drop-in space that provides free all-day breakfasts. The centre has facilities to assist local homeless people, such as showers and laundry facilities, and provides hot lunches three days a week. Craig estimates that the centre provides 1,500 meals and distributes more than two tonnes of donated food a month.

Recorded client occasions, where centre staff interact with those seeking assistance, total more than 1,500 a month. As well as these ongoing commitments, the centre provides 100 emergency relief packages each month to people in acute crisis, including the homeless and those fleeing domestic violence. The packages, which are funded from the centre's own budget, are provided on referral or as a matter of practicality. The centre's social groups include a women's mosaic group, parenting classes and assistance and support for those escaping abuse. The Living Beyond Abuse program and the Circle of Security program for carers of children with difficulties are key parts of the centre's commitment to the Wallsend community. Craig and his staff are concerned about the number of elderly people who lack any kind of social inclusion. Craig warns:

If they don't come here, they don't have anywhere to go. They're skipping meals because many of them live alone and they feel that living alone it is not worth cooking a meal for themselves.

There has also been a spike in the number of people seeking support due to domestic and family violence. Craig warns that there is a call for women's services generally in Wallsend

and that nothing in the local area provides direct services. In the five years to 2016, Wallsend BaptistCare Community Centre helped an average of 17 clients seeking relief from domestic and family violence each month. It is difficult to break the cycle of violence. Adequate community support is required and Wallsend BaptistCare is doing the best it can.

There is not enough crisis accommodation in the Wallsend area. Craig has been pleading with local landlords to open up empty rooms to provide shelter to those escaping crisis situations. The majority of homeless clients helped by BaptistCare are middle-aged, and many have substance abuse and mental health issues. There is simply not enough support in this area. The average wait time for a service to engage with a new client upon referral is three weeks, by which time, Craig warns, a lot of people have already slipped through the cracks. I will do everything I can to support the Wallsend Community Centre. I urge the Government to ensure that the relevant organisations are given the help and resources they need to protect the community, particularly in the areas of aged care and domestic violence.