

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (15:42): Today I wish to speak about volunteers in our community, it being National Volunteer Week. One of my passions is to support volunteers in our community. As the Minister for Volunteers said earlier in question time, the theme for volunteer week this year is 'Now more than ever'. The minister elaborated on this theme, but we also need volunteers now more than ever because the age profile of volunteers in our community is rising rapidly. We need to recruit, retain and resource volunteers more now than in the past.

In South Australia we are very lucky in the sense that we have one of the highest participation rates in Australia, with nearly 600,000 volunteers providing an estimated 1.4 million hours per week of assistance. Nationally, more than 5 million Australians give up more than 700 million hours of their time to help others. The economic contribution to our state and the nation is enormous, and in 2002 it was estimated to be around \$5 billion nationally.

The importance of volunteers is recognised by this Labor government, and that is why it has a clear target in the State Strategic Plan for volunteering. The state government considers volunteering to be a critical part of the state's cultural, economic and social wellbeing. The plan sets a target of maintaining a high level of volunteering in South Australia, with a 50 per cent or higher participation rate. We have reached that target and our challenge now is to maintain it.

In addition, the government has a number of initiatives to support volunteers. The Community Voices Program enables Flinders university students to work—

The Hon. A. KOUTSANTONIS: Great program.

Mr PICCOLO: Thank you, minister—with volunteer groups to produce television commercials or short films to encourage volunteering in the community. A sustainable online community engagement program allows UniSA students to help community groups to build free websites, produce promotional materials and market their services.

I am proud to say that when I was mayor of Gawler I was involved with the establishment at Gawler of the first Volunteer Resource Centre in this state. Also, Corporates4Communities are matching business volunteers with community organisations, providing them with more hands on deck as well as access to new skills. There is a whole range of other resources the government is producing to support our volunteers in our community.

At the local level within my electorate, my community is well served by volunteers, which is a common feature of most country and regional centres. In fact, there is not one walk of life in my community that is not touched upon by the involvement of volunteers. I refer to schools: there are parents in classrooms, canteens, sports and school governing councils. There are volunteers in churches. Most weekend sport, if not all weekend sport in the community, is run by volunteers. Support for the elderly and the aged includes Meals on Wheels, the Gawler Care and Share, the pensioner's association and the senior citizens' groups. They all help a section of our community.

In relation to community safety, we look at the CFS and the SES: they do a wonderful job in keeping our community safe and helping out when things go wrong. In relation to community support, we have the community enabled houses and charities such as Vinnies, the Salvos and U Care. We also have the Men's Shed, which provides a range of support services to men in our community.

In the area of recreation and leisure, there is a number of groups that provide a range of programs for people in our community. We have the Gawler Environment and Heritage Association, which is very active in protecting and promoting environmental programs throughout the electorate. Also, a number of councils have council volunteer programs—for example, the recreation centre, the volunteer centre and the visitor centre all have volunteers who make them operate well.

There is one particular program in my community that I would like to highlight, and that is the anti-graffiti team. It is one of those programs that you cannot highlight too much because it would have a negative effect. This group of volunteers does a great job cleaning up graffiti in our town. They are one of those unsung groups because, if you promote it, it only encourages some people in our community to do the wrong thing. However, I pay tribute to those groups of people who keep our town tidy and clean.

There are the service clubs for the community projects—the youth advisory committees, the residents' associations, the institute and town hall committees, the cultural groups and arts societies, and education.

Our society benefits enormously in a social, cultural and educational sense from the work of volunteers and without them our society would be very different—it would be very much the poorer. So, in this week marking National Volunteer Week, I would like to pay tribute to our volunteers in our community, and I also take this opportunity to thank the former minister for volunteers (Hon. Mr Koutsantonis) and the current minister for giving me the pleasure of chairing the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group.

Time expired.