

State axes grants for \$5.9m savings

Social cutback

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SINGLE mums, disabled people and victims of domestic violence are among those who will miss out on vital support schemes after a series of grant programs has been shelved by the cash-strapped Barnett Government.

Four programs targeting youth, women, social innovation and enterprise are no longer accepting applications for funding as the Department of Local Government and Communities scrambles to deliver savings of \$5.9 million over three years.

It comes less than a year after the Barnett Government hosted its first social innovation conference, where then-community minister Robyn McSweeney said the grants program for that area was “highly successful” and delivered “real benefits”.

The \$10 million Social Enterprise Fund was launched in 2010, but so far less than \$4 million has been handed out.

Opposition communities spokesman David Templeman said cutting the programs was a cynical move by a desperate Government.

“Cutting these kind of grant programs because (Premier Colin) Barnett cannot balance the books during a period of record revenue growth is completely shameful,” he said.

Balga Detached Youth Work Inc received a \$370,000 Social Innovation Grant last year to run a construction-based work training program for young

indigenous offenders.

Agency manager Mike Dixon said there was no way the project would have happened without the funding.

“The project is making a huge difference for the young people we see,” he said. “The money we received helps us, but also helped us help other organisations.”

Victims’ support group Angelhands received funding through the Grants for Women program of \$4500 to run a retreat for women and their foster daughters who were victims of crime and violence.

“The impact the retreat had was huge,” relationships manager Amy Bowlay said. “Every grant helps small not-for-profits like us operate. While we recognise and applaud the Government on new programs and initiatives for victims of crime, it would be disappointing to see existing funding lost.”

South West Counselling Inc chief executive Karen Somerville ran a healing workshop for women in the Busselton and Margaret River region after bushfires and shark attacks. She said the grants enabled community organisations to value-add to their services.

A Department of Communities spokeswoman confirmed applications were currently not being taken in the four grant programs.

“An evaluation of the Social Innovation Grants Program and

the Social Enterprise Fund will be conducted over the next several months,” she said.

The spokeswoman said the department was considering if it had the budget capacity to continue to support the Grants for Women program.

She said the Youth Activities Grant program was being reviewed “with the intent to align it with the priorities/direction of the new Department of Local Government and Communities”.

Community and Public Sector Union branch secretary Toni Walkington feared the drying up of grants open to the sector would stymie new thinking and pilot projects that could help vulnerable people in the community.

Ms Walkington said it was also concerning that the Equal Opportunity Commission’s Substantive Equality Unit, which ensures marginalised and minority groups are not disadvantaged or systemically discriminated against, had been abolished.

Attorney-General Michael Mischin said the unit, which was established in 2004-05, had “run its course” and would be dismantled from July 1 next year.

In the 2011-12 State Budget, Premier Barnett announced \$604 million in additional funding for a “sustainable not-for-profit sector”.



