



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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SENIOR CITIZENS

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (7.19 p.m.): I rise with pleasure tonight to talk about the tremendous resource—that wonderful fund of knowledge and experience—that is available to us in Cairns from the older people of Cairns. Of course, I have known this in some ways from meeting with individuals in the community over the many years that I have lived in Cairns, as well as through the invitations that I receive from time to time to attend meetings with groups in which senior citizens are represented. However, the particular occasion that I wish to speak about tonight was the consultation that was held on 30 March in Cairns for the Queensland Framework for Ageing, conducted by staff of the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

It was very instructive and, indeed, heart warming to hear so many of the older people of the community talking about the opportunities that they would like to have to participate more fully in the life of the community and even, may I say, in the prosperity of Cairns and the region. It is instructive to hear the topics that preoccupied them most, and these were not topics so much of their own particular needs—of their own selfish, one might say, concerns; instead, they were really about the barriers that are preventing older people in our community from participating as fully as they are able to do and would wish to do.

Probably the topic of greatest importance to them was the barrier of transport. It is not easy for many older people, particularly in a regional centre such as Cairns, to access community centres, shopping centres, educational institutions and even to get into town. Many of them are not in a position to drive and many of them are not given the opportunity of easily accessible public transport services. Many, too, are pensioners who cannot afford taxis as a matter of course and many, too, have some physical limitations that make access to and the cost of transport very important to them. They even pointed out the little barriers that those of us who are younger, fitter and more able do not recognise: barriers of stairs and even broken pavements.

Beyond transport, the other issue of great concern to them was what they perceive to be barriers to employment. Many may not be in a fit state or wish to work full time, but their knowledge and their experience is vibrant inside them. They wish that the Government was able to take a leadership role in setting in place some opportunities for part-time work. They pointed out quite rightly that even the volunteer work in which many of them are involved costs them some money. Were honorariums provided, that could assist them to participate more fully in voluntary positions, and they would be eager to do so.

Mr Sullivan: And older persons have a very low rate of absenteeism from their work, too.

Ms BOYLE: That is true. I thank the honourable member for pointing that out. They are reliable and, of course, wise. That is a resource that we as a society should not be allowing to, as it were, linger in the suburbs.

They mentioned, too, the difficulties that they are having in dealing with technology, particularly today's information technology, and asked that our Government consider ways in which we can make training, particularly in the use of computers and the Internet, less frightening for them. They spoke, too, of the problems that they experience from time to time with the lack of respect that exists throughout our society for older people. One person in particular recommended—and it is embarrassing for us to consider that this even happens—a code of conduct for public servants in relation to their contact with older people, including treating older people as equals and recognising that age does not

mean that older people are not bright. Unfortunately, they have been some of the attitudes that have been observed, particularly in younger members of our community. Surely it is beholden upon all of us to set standards of respect.

A particular tip that many of us may understand already in terms of our own deterioration of function is that Government publications, warnings on fire alarms or telephone books—all kinds of information— should be available in large-print versions. The decline in eyesight, while not at all paralleling the decline in intellectual or other capabilities, is nonetheless a common one. So I put to this House that it is not just older people in Cairns, of course, but older people all over Queensland who would like to and are willing to make a greater contribution to our communities and to our prosperity. The Queensland Framework for Ageing may just do that for these people.

Time expired.
