



Speech by

Mrs J. GAMIN

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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REHABILITATION OF DRUG USERS

Mrs GAMIN (Burleigh—NPA) (11.19 p.m.): I believe that drug courts would have enormous merit in the fight against escalating drug use and abuse. These courts would be designed to deal with lower level drug offences and drug related crimes. They would provide a system of early intervention for young people at the beginning of their drug cycle, at the stage where their drug habits have led them into their first crimes. Drug courts would provide offenders with an opportunity to seek counselling and to pursue rehabilitation. Addicted offenders would be required to become drug free and would have to undergo random testing. If they failed a test, they would be sent back into the mainstream court system.

I was dismayed and distressed to read an article in the Gold Coast Sun on 10 March regarding a proposed mobile needle exchange on the southern Gold Coast to be funded by Queensland Health. There have been subsequent and damning media reports. As the local member representing a significant portion of the southern Gold Coast, I am really angry that Queensland Health did not do me the courtesy of seeking my views on this matter, although some Gold Coast City councillors were consulted by officers of Queensland Health. It is inappropriate, to say the least, for me to have to uncover this proposal from media reports. Local residents are outraged and are writing to me and ringing me with their objections.

The Minister for Health may not be aware, although the Department of Health should be aware, that a similar system was trialled and failed in 1990. A needle bus project was launched from the Logan Community Health Centre at the end of 1989. Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker, it was you who gave me instructions on how to find the Logan Community Health Centre back then in 1989. The bus was based at Gold Coast Youth Support, Oak Avenue, Miami, in the early part of 1990, and was abandoned a few months later.

Despite all the literature that is handed out about the health implications associated with injecting drug use, needle exchange programs, whether static or mobile, are in fact needle hand-outs and not exchanges, and guarantee that participants will remain addicts. The proposed southern Gold Coast mobile trial will only draw drug users and particularly drug dealers into the suburbs where the van or bus is positioned, just as happened in New South Wales when a similar program was trialled in that State. I cannot express strongly enough my abhorrence of this proposal.

Drug courts certainly seem to be a step in the right direction as the community struggles to deal with the consequences of illegal drug use. But drug courts will only work if adequate funding is provided to treatment and rehabilitation programs, such as those offered by Mirikai, the Gold Coast Drug Council's establishment at West Burleigh. I am patron of Mirikai, and over the years I have put in great efforts to attract funding to that worthwhile body.

Mirikai holds national accreditation and provides residential and outreach programs for people who want to kick the drug habit and who want to turn their lives around from drug dependency and its attendant health, social and ultimately criminal problems. Mirikai is the only centre available for drug rehabilitation and detoxification for users under the age of 18 years. It also deals with the dual diagnosis of the physical problems associated with drug abuse, as well as serious mental problems. Dual diagnosis is looked upon as all too hard by other agencies; they just walk away from it.

Mirikai's intervention and education programs do work, and there is an 80% success rate. But there are only 30 beds available, there is a permanent waiting list, applicants are turned away every day

and additional funding is urgently required. Bitter disappointment has followed the news that the Gold Coast Drug Council has received none of the Commonwealth's recently announced anti-drugs funding to 50 voluntary and community agencies. On the Gold Coast, Southport's Goldbridge receives a whacking \$1m; the Salvation Army, \$708,800; and the Gold Coast Aids Association and Injectors Newsline—GAAIN—which is sponsoring the mobile needle bus about which I have just been talking, gets \$226,198. That is almost \$2m being funnelled into the Gold Coast—and it is welcome—but Mirikai gets nothing. It gets no money, just a kick in the teeth. The Commonwealth funding process is quite bizarre, and I will be taking Mirikai's cause much further on this funding issue.

Mirikai had applied for a \$250,000 grant for an early intervention program at the Southport Court House aimed at identifying and referring young drug addicts to counselling and rehabilitation as a condition of bail—a court-initiated program targeted at young people at the beginning of their drug addiction and stopping it in its tracks. How well that would fit in with the drug courts that we were debating last night! What a pity the Government will not listen to good ideas just because they are put up by the Opposition. The absolute travesty of the Commonwealth drug funding needs to be explored and dealt with.

Time expired.
