



Speech by

## Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 15 March 2000

### LIFE EDUCATION CENTRES

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.20 p.m.): The fight against the destructive and growing drug culture in our community is undermined by the Beattie Labor Government's axing of funds to Life Education. No one drug and alcohol initiative on its own is the answer to the scourge which is killing or frying the brains of our young people.

An effective drug and alcohol policy of Government has to be multifaceted and interactive with the community sector. It is incomprehensible that this Beattie Labor Government has slashed funding to what is an effective anti-drug, pro-health education program operating in partnership with community members who work with our schools.

Life Education has successfully met stringent evaluation criteria in the years it has operated in schools. It provides an invaluable resource to 150,000 young people in Queensland schools. On the Sunshine Coast, some 12,000 students annually benefit from this program. In so many regions throughout the State, now that this Labor Government has slashed the funding these local committees, who have worked so hard to provide this resource to their schools, will really struggle to make up the shortfall in funding.

The committee on the Sunshine Coast receives approximately \$18,000 in Government funding. Its members fundraise a similar amount to put the program into these schools. They work very hard, as do people in many of the other regions up and down the coast, and they will find it extremely difficult to make up the shortfall. The result will be that the community will be the poorer because the Government has shunned the local, caring efforts to put this program into our schools.

Partnership with the community is a very important part of an effective assault on the drug and alcohol problem in our community. Based on the Government's reasoning for axing Life Education—it claims falsely that it has no proven benefit—I have to ask what criteria the Government uses to evaluate other health promotion activities of Government.

We accept that health promotion and appropriate education about how people can improve their health are worthwhile activities. Yet let us look at the track record of this Government. It axed Laurie Lawrence's Kids Alive safe swimming program because it thought it could do a better job. That program took a very small amount of money and was run by a man who had managed to raise community support, yet the Government said, "We can use that money better." I can tell the Government now that Laurie Lawrence's program, for which he went out and got corporate sponsorship, has a far higher profile than anything any of the Beattie Labor Government's bureaucrats dreamed up.

That is the problem: this Government has no concept of partnering with the community. It thinks that all good ideas are born within bureaucracy and that it can shun the efforts of partnering with the community, which is a very important part of getting a health promotion message across and being effective in helping our young people stand against drugs in the community.

The Labor Government's crazy ideas with regard to Life Education are not in line with the reaction I have had from the parents, students and teachers I have talked to in my electorate. The Drug and Alcohol Foundation has roundly condemned the Government's axing of this program's funding.

The AMA has come out and quite rightly criticised the amount of money the Government is currently spending on drug education in our schools.

The Minister has not proven anything about the quality of the funding he is putting into the Education Department. In fact, some 50c per head of funding is provided for education against drugs in our schools. Yet the Minister was caught out claiming that that figure was \$82. That would have meant some 1,000 full-time specialists in our schools, and they do not exist. I am afraid that the Minister has no credibility when he talks about the calibre and the effectiveness of the existing drug program in State Schools, because it is not funded. It has no proven outcomes at this time.

We support a curriculum in schools that was mandated by the coalition under the previous Education Minister, Bob Quinn. That drug message was in schools, but we support communities having that resource of Life Education, which is well regarded in local communities. I have heard kids talk about the outcomes of that program. This Government has acted to take away that funding and will close down or severely inhibit the ability of these communities to deliver this resource to schools that have chosen to invite this program in because they know of its effectiveness. They know its effectiveness in the framework of the total alcohol and drug policy.

Time expired.

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