



Speech by

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Hansard 7 August 2001

MEN'S CRISIS SUPPORT CENTRE, GYMPIE

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT (Charters Towers—ALP) (11.47 a.m.): I wish to draw to the attention of the House the work of a group of men who not only are an inspiration to those with whom they come in contact but also provide a model for what community spirit really means. I refer to the work of the people at the Queensland Men's Crisis Support Centre located at Gympie, whom I visited with recently in company with Mrs Rae Gâté, our former Labor candidate for Gympie. Rae has worked closely with this group for a length of time and, indeed, is to be commended for her care and concern for all the people of the Gympie electorate.

Some six years ago, a group of men, then in their fifties, became concerned that, at their age, they were unable to find productive work. These men had adequate skill levels and found it difficult to understand why they could no longer secure meaningful employment. So concerned were they that they initially formed the Gympie Men's Health Group in order to gather some community support. These men found there are many in the community who are finding it difficult—if not impossible—to overcome some of the more damaging and hitherto unrecognised problems men face in today's changing society. Since incorporation, the crisis centre has actively encouraged any who are experiencing confusion, anxiety and depression to express their concerns in a male environment—to talk to men who have been through similar experiences. This philosophy met with success. In fact, some men travelled from the Hervey Bay-Maryborough and the Noosa-Cooroy regions to access the services being offered.

As a result of their work, the crisis centre discovered that, left unresolved, the confusion and anxiety felt by many men inevitably led to individual and socially destructive behaviour—behaviour that imposes on a community an enormous financial cost and which undermines social resources. What became apparent was that men coming to the centre were not concerned about what might be termed health problems. These men were not seeking help about prostate cancer, giving up smoking, lack of exercise or alcohol addiction. What these men were concerned about were relationships with their partners or children, with work or with the community.

In pursuit of their objectives, the centre also offers emergency accommodation for the new homeless. Today many men cannot obtain normal housing. For various reasons, men may find they are in debt to Centrelink or the Housing Commission or black-listed by rental agents. The centre provides men with an opportunity to obtain housing while working towards re-establishing their rental credentials.

It would seem fair to say that in some aspects current federal government policies and programs have largely overlooked these aspects of men and their problems. While it is true that there are programs directed at particular men's health issues, such as cancer and diabetes, and programs directed at homeless men, such programs may not necessarily be the social markers that gauge the extent of men's health. A more holistic approach could be called for.

This group knew that while men know they might feel depressed and confused at critical times, they also know they have the ability to solve their personal problems, given the opportunity. They knew what men needed was a process whereby they could work through their confusion and anxiety in a constructive and safe environment. This is the fundamental philosophy of the crisis centre—that men who are treated with respect and dignity gain the ability to resolve their own issues.

As a result of their work, the centre has been involved in a number of community projects. Of note is their involvement with the local women's centre in a partnership against domestic and family

violence. In fact, the House might note that men who have committed domestic violence are beginning to access the centre for counselling. This should only be encouraged. The Men's Crisis Support Centre is staffed purely by volunteers and does not receive any government funding whatsoever. Apart from a small Cooloola shire grant and enormous community support, the centre is totally self-supporting.

The men's crisis support centre has achieved much with very little. What it lacks in finances, it makes up for with personal enthusiasm and widespread community support. I am impressed by the high regard in which the general community holds the work of the centre. Its work is unselfish and dedicated to filling a gap currently existing in support programs. I can only add my voice in support of this group of men who lead by example and seek to address constructively the more damaging social effects of economic and social change visited on men in regional areas of our state. Today I ask the parliament to honour the wonderful work done in Gympie and district by the men's crisis support group.
