



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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DRUG COURTS

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (11.57 a.m.): Not one life will be saved by the Labor government's spending of millions of dollars on Beattie's footbridge, yet the death rate in Queensland from drugs and addiction increases. Thousands of young people who are caught in the vicious life of addiction cannot break free unless the government changes its priorities from wasteful spending on footbridges and Lang Park extravaganzas to instead helping people at risk of death, harm and suffering. Crime Commission data shows that there are an estimated 85,000 amphetamine users in the state and 17,000 heroin users. There are no drug detoxification beds for under 18s outside of Brisbane. Rehabilitation and detoxification beds and services for youth under 30 are also woefully non-existent across vast areas of this state.

Furthermore, the drug court initiative is failing because of a lack of funding for treatment and assessment. There are backlogs in people awaiting decisions for eligibility or access to residential beds. It has now been revealed that 66 people with drug problems were awaiting a decision on eligibility for the program or for a residential bed after assessment in the drug courts program and other treatment. We have to ask: while these people wait, are these drug users still in remand—in other words, incarcerated and untreated, contrary to the principles of the trial—or are they still back out in the community untreated for their drug habit, which is also contrary to the principles of the drug courts project? Drug courts with diversion of drug offenders to treatment is a program that the opposition not only supported but also championed. We also clearly rang the warning bells that the programs had to be funded properly with appropriate treatment options if they were to be successful. Our concerns have now been shown to be valid. We cannot have people waiting for the appropriate treatment.

What about the thousands of drug users across the state who want to reform their habit and who are not in the drug courts system? Most of these people have next to no chance of accessing an appropriate service in a timely way if they live outside of south-east Queensland. Even those within south-east Queensland will find that there are lengthy waiting periods—sometimes up to several months—before they can access detoxification or rehabilitation.

The reality is that when people are willing to reform they cannot wait several months. They may not be alive in several months or that window of opportunity may have passed. Tragically, that is what often happens. It is time for a network of youth oriented detoxification and rehabilitation beds across this state for which there is no wait time for assessment or treatment. The reality is that these people cannot wait the months it takes in the south-east corner and that many of these people throughout the state cannot travel to the south-east corner.

I think it is appropriate that I refer to the minister's non-answer to a question I asked her this morning in this House about detoxification and rehabilitation services. If one listened to the minister, one would think that there has been a fall-off in the number of illicit drug users injecting drugs, yet the reality is that there has been something like a doubling. In areas such as the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast there has been a doubling over the course of the last four years.

The minister has ignored the fact that about half the needles distributed are free—in other words, paid for by taxpayers—and the other half are being sold through pharmacies. If there is to be a proper addressing of the problem of drugs in this state and an understanding of the injecting drug usage in this state, we have to add those two figures together. When we do, we realise that 10 million needles have been distributed in this state over the last year. That is a serious increase in needle

usage. There has been an increase in pharmacy distribution of needles, and this is an indication of drug use in our community. There has not been a fall-off in the number of illicit drug users in the community injecting drugs; there has been an increase.

I think the minister has to get her head out of the clouds and realise that there is a significant problem. The situation has not got any better; it is getting worse. The government can take \$22 million and spend it on a footbridge in Brisbane, but if it put that money into rehabilitation and detoxification services for young people throughout this state it would have a significant impact on the problem. I feel that is a far better investment in the future of this state than a block of concrete. The footbridge project is the result of a disastrous planning process which has led to a blow-out in the cost. The minister thinks that it is an icon and that it will be good for Queensland. I disagree. This government has its priorities wrong.
