



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 9 August 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Juvenile Crime

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10.06 a.m.), by leave: All too often we hear stories of juvenile crime waves, of how our courts are being forced to deal with more and more young offenders. At least that can be the community perception. But the facts are often different, and in the terms of juvenile justice this is certainly the case.

What our communities and members of this House need to understand is that most juvenile offending is minor and transitory in nature. In any year in Queensland approximately one per cent of 10 to 16 year old young people appear in court charged with offences. For approximately 60 per cent of that one per cent, it is their only experience with the justice system as juveniles. A small number of highly recidivist young offenders are responsible for the majority of offending by juveniles.

This government is committed to being not only tough on crime but also tough on the causes of crime. The way to tackle the issue of juvenile justice is by tackling the roots of the problem. That is what we are doing with a relatively new initiative that has had positive results in dealing with young offenders, particularly recidivist offenders.

The establishment of youth justice services has resulted in some encouraging results. Three services have already been established—in Townsville, Ipswich and Logan—and two new ones will be commenced in the near future, at Caboolture-Redcliffe and at Maryborough-Hervey Bay. A comprehensive evaluation of the three operating youth justice services has been conducted, and although the services have been operating for only a short period data shows an apparent reduction in the rate of recidivism after contact with a youth justice service.

Highly marginalised young people have been placed and supported in the pre-employment programs conducted at the services. This is a significant contribution to reducing their chance of offending. Over 90 young people have been successful in obtaining full-time employment since the establishment of the services.

The services have quickly established credibility and strong support locally from the police, local authorities, the indigenous community and relevant service providers, and emphasise the success of holistic approaches to controlling crime and making safer communities by working in partnership with them. This has been exemplified by the partnership between the Townsville Youth Justice Service and the elders and community of Palm Island, which has led to a 63 per cent reduction in the number of young people on juvenile justice orders on Palm Island in an 18-month period.

From November 1999 to May 2001 there has been a steady decrease, from 2,139 to 1,952, in the number of juveniles on supervised juvenile justice orders, indicating that youth justice services and other strategies of this government are effectively working to combat crime.

The average number of young people held in the new Brisbane Youth Detention Centre for April, May and June has been 76. This is good news. What this says is that this government has effective strategies to help some of our troubled young people and to tackle the difficult issue of juvenile crime. These are facts that members of this House should remember. These are facts they should use when they visit their local Neighbourhood Watch groups.

It is painfully clear that our young people should not be demonised for the crime problem in our community, and members of this House should ensure that our young people receive the support and encouragement they deserve.
