



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 2 August 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Drug Courts

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: I am pleased to inform the House that our government's drug courts trial has had its first graduation this week. This is a significant milestone for this important program, which is providing an opportunity for drug-addicted offenders to break the drug cycle.

In June last year our government established this 30-month drugs court trial at the Beenleigh, Southport and Ipswich Magistrates Courts. It is an integral part of our commitment to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. It is also part of our whole-of-government strategy which aims to attack the drugs problem through education, prevention and finding better treatments and rehabilitation for addicts, combined with a major focus on crime prevention.

The drugs court gives offenders a chance to put an end to their drug habit and their criminal activity, which is good for them and good for the community as a whole. Drug-addicted offenders who meet strict eligibility criteria can be diverted to intensive rehabilitation programs. It is a chance to reclaim their life.

Obviously, it is not appropriate for me to disclose the name of this week's graduate, who needs to be able to get on with life with some anonymity. But I do offer my congratulations to this graduate and good wishes for the future. There is still no doubt a tough road ahead. This 25 year old person was referred to the drugs court at a time when their future was bleak—an addiction to heroin and a desperate cycle of committing crimes to get drug money. The participant went through all of the phases of the rehabilitation program and has reclaimed their life.

As any parent of a drug-addicted child will tell us, it is outcomes like this that make the drugs court so valuable to our community. A successful rehabilitation means less housebreakings, car theft and other crimes committed by drug-addicted offenders to pay for their habit. Beating drug addiction is not easy, but this program offers a lifeline that did not exist in Queensland before our government took the step last June.

I am pleased to advise members that this program is currently the most successful in the country. In New South Wales 57.5 per cent of participants are staying with the rehabilitation program after being given an opportunity by their drugs courts. Here in Queensland more than 70 per cent of people are remaining with the program. Our government believes that this trial is worth pursuing. In fact, we are currently planning for an expansion to Cairns and Townsville.

There are widespread benefits for the community in breaking the cycle of crime from drugs, and that is why we initiated the drugs court trial. I am sure that any parent who has a son or daughter with a drug problem would prefer their child to be given a chance to kick the habit rather than go to prison.
