



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 7 November 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Legal Aid Queensland

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (9.58 a.m.), by leave: I am pleased to inform the House of Legal Aid Queensland's outstanding achievements during the past financial year outlined in its annual report which I tabled earlier. I should mention that, more than ever before, Legal Aid programs are reaching out to Queenslanders in all areas of the state. Its rural and regional strategy has greatly expanded access to services for people living outside Brisbane.

At the heart of this strategy is a unique network of partnerships with community agencies called community access points, or CAPs. These have been established in 28 communities around Queensland—from Cooktown and Bowen in the north and east to Stanthorpe in the south and Camooweal. Communities can access fact sheets, self-help kits and an extensive legal database.

Underpinning this expansion is our government's commitment of \$2 million to community legal centres over the next four years. This commitment enabled a landmark agreement to be negotiated by Legal Aid Queensland with the Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services during the past 12 months. This agreement means that community legal centres can have confidence about their level of funding for the next four years, giving them the opportunity to plan and improve services.

During the past financial year, there have been a number of innovative initiatives by Legal Aid Queensland to improve access to justice. Some of these include: an indigenous communities telephone hotline providing legal information, advice and referral services; the employment of indigenous community liaison officers at offices in Cairns, Townsville and Rockhampton to work with councils and community organisations; the employment of two additional criminal compensation lawyers in Cairns and Townsville to provide services to Cape York and Thursday Island, Palm Island and the Gulf of Carpentaria; the introduction of best practice guidelines to help professionals provide a consistent level of service to those affected by domestic violence; valuable training programs for Queensland's youth workers in a range of issues affecting under-eighteens—more than 250 youth workers attended workshops throughout the state; improvements in access to legal advice for prisoners with the extension of video conferencing facilities to take in Brisbane Women's and Wolston Correctional Centres; the attendance by barristers from Legal Aid's group of in-house counsel at about 95 weeks of circuits in regional areas—a new record for Legal Aid Queensland; and Legal Aid Queensland's Consumer Protection Unit won the inaugural Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association's civil justice award for Queensland.

Our government believes that all Queenslanders must have the opportunity to access the legal system. The innovative and proactive work of Legal Aid Queensland over the past 12 months is creating further opportunities for this to occur.
