



Speech by

CHRISTINE SMITH

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Hansard 16 April 2002

LIBRARY, WUJAL WUJAL

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (7.22 p.m.): It is not news to anyone in this place that Aboriginal communities in Queensland suffer some appalling deprivations. One that we do not hear a great deal about is a lack of books—reference books, storybooks, books for learning and books for fun; books which bring the big, wide world into the smallest community.

Two years ago, it was stated that out of 36 remote Aboriginal communities in Queensland only six had a public library. This is an appalling state of affairs. We all know that we go on learning all through life. I hope that I do. But unless a love of learning is encouraged at a young age it is difficult to develop it later in life.

One of my constituents, Ms Patricia Devine, well known for her word puzzles in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*, decided the situation was unacceptable. Words and reading are one of her passions and she was horrified by the lack of books available, particularly to children. So she was determined to do something about it. Patricia is an outstanding example of what can be achieved with determination and commitment.

She discovered that the Wujal Wujal community in the far north of Queensland was without a library. In fact, not one of the 100 primary school children owned a dictionary. However, within six months she had ensured that every child in Wujal Wujal had a dictionary. Patricia then began her quest to provide this community with a library. She received support and encouragement from many, including Phillip Adams, a journalist who featured her plans in the *Weekend Australian*, giving her much-needed publicity and inducing a flood of donations.

She sent letters to publishing houses requesting donations of one or two books and in return they sent her boxes of books. Dick Smith, Bunnings, Encyclopaedia Britannica and the much-lamented Ansett also made donations. Students at Elanora Primary School on the Gold Coast were particularly generous, being responsible for donations of more than 700 books. All of these books found their way to Patricia's front door. Her home is bursting with books. She has undertaken the task of sorting and cataloguing the collection and now a library of well over 5,000 books is ready to be despatched to Wujal Wujal.

Patricia has received great assistance from the Indigenous Libraries Unit of the State Library of Queensland and from the Community Development Employment Project, particularly its local coordinator Kate Prout. The CDEP has offered the collection a room and, once it is ascertained that the room is suitable, the library will be installed. An added bonus is that the library will also provide employment for one person in the community.

I thank my colleague the Honourable Matt Foley for his assistance in paving the way for the library to be established in Wujal Wujal. Patricia has long been concerned about the damage that has been wrought on the Aboriginal people, but rather than lamenting she did something very practical and wonderful. I offer Patricia Devine my heartiest congratulations. She has shown us that there is always a way to help and has enriched the lives of hundreds of children. We need more like her.