



Speech by

**CHRISTINE SMITH**

**MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH**

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Hansard 31 October 2002

### **DRUG DIVERSION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs SMITH** (Burleigh—ALP) (2.42 p.m.): For a family not to be touched by the curse of illegal drugs they are indeed blessed. This curse knows no boundaries. It affects all levels of society, from the most affluent to the socially disadvantaged. I have heard parents say, 'It is not a problem in my family, it could never happen.' I would respectfully advise: never say never. Drug use is a vicious cycle. Users frequently become involved in crime because they need money for drugs. Innocent people are also affected as are those whose homes have been broken into, bags snatched or cars stolen. Many young people I have spoken with tell me how the use of illegal drugs has ruined their lives. Their families have disowned them, society has turned its back on them and the only friends they have are fellow addicts. Parents have told me horrific stories of their children's spiral into drug addiction and the impact not only on the immediate family but on friends and colleagues.

In the electorate of Burleigh there is a facility which attempts and mostly succeeds in addressing the problems and returning to young people the lives they thought they had thrown away. Mirikai began as a drug referral centre in 1971. Since then, it has grown to become a nationally accredited provider of alcohol and drug education, prevention, assessment, referral, detoxification and rehabilitation services. I publicly acknowledge the outstanding results achieved at Mirikai. The dedicated workers and volunteers create miracles every day. Many referrals to Mirikai come from the courts, and residents have told me that had they found Mirikai much earlier they may never have hit rock bottom and ended up in the court in the first place.

The Cannabis Diversion program shows that approximately 85 per cent of all drug possession offences in Queensland involve only small amounts of cannabis, with the result that the program has the potential to free up the court system for more important matters. It has been shown that early intervention is a way of assisting young people address the consequences of drug addiction before their lives are irreparably harmed. The bill will facilitate the trialling of the Illicit Drug Court Diversion program. This does not mean that the government has gone soft on drugs but that it will support innovative solutions to addressing drug related crime.

Diversion is not about tolerating the illegal use of drugs but about improving the chances of stopping people using drugs. Eligible offenders will be required to attend an authorised assessment and education intervention program rather than be charged. This is not an easy way out for offenders. Those who fail to attend will be returned to court to be sentenced for the original drug offence. If the passing of this bill means that just one young person is helped to overcome a drug problem, it is more than worth while. I wholeheartedly commend the bill to the House.