



Speech by

DIANNE REILLY

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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STEPPING FORWARD DECLARATION

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (5.29 p.m.): On 25 July I joined with the Minister for Youth Affairs, the Hon. Matt Foley, to launch a joint declaration by Commonwealth, state and territory ministers for education, training, employment, youth and community services. The Stepping Forward declaration, which I have a copy of here, represents a new way forward in improving pathways for all young people and is a significant achievement—it is a real first, in fact—to seek cooperation between all state governments and the Commonwealth. The minister was a key player in the development of the joint declaration and the gathering of national support and signatories. He is in fact to be congratulated for his vision and commitment to the youth of Queensland and Australia.

In government we are in the business of shaping the future. We cannot possibly hope to do this without talking to and listening to the very people who will be the major players in that future—our children and our youth. I am very excited by the joint declaration's stated vision of an Australia in which young people's opinions and contributions are sought and valued. The declaration sets out a number of challenges related to supporting and responding to young people's needs. Most importantly, the declaration commits governments to developing practical ways to increase social, education and employment outcomes for young people at risk. The great challenge will be to see how politicians, community leaders and public servants react, because strangely enough and sadly the majority of mature adults in our society do not think that young people have much of value to say.

However, I do not agree. I have found that when young people speak out they are very passionate and have a lot to say. They are very passionate about things like the environment, human rights and social justice. They despise inequality, intolerance and prejudice. They care about the future and they want to secure not just a healthy society but a healthy planet. They worry about these things—and many other issues—to the very core of their being. Their sense of helplessness is what causes them to feel despondent, isolated and disenchanting, and that is when many adults think that they do not care and do not have anything to say. The problem is that they care too much, but they certainly have little faith in our system of democracy in representing their needs.

Too many young people feel alienated from our political systems and our governments and think that they have no relevance to them or their futures. That is why many do not enrol to vote at 18, because they do not think that their vote will make a difference. It is up to us as politicians to make the processes relevant to them, to communicate with them and to listen to them. This declaration and things like the Queensland Youth Charter are positive steps forward, but they require the commitment of all politicians on all sides of politics and all community leaders to work together in practice. I encourage members to get hold of the declaration, read it, talk to their community's young people and think about ways in which they can make the sentiments within these documents a reality.