



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

Hansard 29 April 2003

IPSWICH DRUG COURT TRIALS

Mr LIVINGSTONE (Ipswich West—ALP) (11.45 a.m.): On 20 March this year I had an opportunity to attend a session of the Ipswich drug court. I was tremendously impressed with this important government initiative, and I feel that it needs to be brought to the attention of every responsible person within our community and our state.

The philosophy of the drug court is primarily about breaking the cycle of drug dependence. We are all aware of the effects on the community from drug offenders repeatedly stealing and committing crimes in order to pay for their drug addictions. The drug courts give offenders an opportunity to get their lives in order, to kick their habit and to try to get back to a normal happy existence instead of going to jail and compounding their mistakes. It also gives the offenders' families some hope for the future that their troubled lives might possibly get back on track. It should be a matter of grave concern to everyone that statistics show that approximately 75 per cent of crimes in our community are drug related. Therefore, every successful rehabilitation through the drug court program will mean fewer crimes committed by drug addicted offenders.

The introduction of the south-east Queensland drug court trial in June 2000 was welcomed as a positive step forward in crime prevention. Drug courts in Queensland are established under the Drug Rehabilitation (Court Diversion) Act 2000, which was enacted on 13 June 2000. The act permitted the prescribed pilot program courts to issue intensive drug rehabilitation orders to eligible offenders. These eligible offenders, who would otherwise be facing jail, are placed on an intensive drug rehabilitation order requiring them to take part in a designated treatment rehabilitation program.

Any breach of the conditions of an intensive drug rehabilitation order results in the offender being sentenced for the original offence or offences and serving a prison sentence. Initially, pilot program courts were established at Beenleigh, Ipswich and Southport magistrates courts. It was an election commitment of the Beattie government to expand the drug court trial to regional Queensland.

This commitment was fulfilled by establishing the new pilot program drug courts in Cairns and Townsville on 1 November last year. In the two and a half years of the south-east Queensland trial, 272 intensive drug rehabilitation orders have been issued. Of these, 50 offenders have graduated, 138 were unable to complete their intensive drug rehabilitation orders and 84 are still in the process of completing their rehabilitation.

As the Member for Ipswich West, I have been aware for many years of the problems associated with drug related crime, not only in Ipswich but in many other areas. The first sitting day of the Ipswich drug court was on 16 June 2000. The court sat weekly until March 2002, after which it moved to fortnightly sittings. This has resulted in 100 sittings of the Ipswich Drug Court to date. During the Ipswich trial period, 49 intensive drug rehabilitation orders were made. Of these, 10 have graduated to date, 19 have been terminated, and the remaining 20 are continuing with their rehabilitation program. Of the 20 offenders still continuing the program, 10 are living in their own or family accommodation, and 10 are in supported accommodation.

Let me take a moment to acknowledge the involvement and commitment of the Department of Housing and the Department of Families in this accommodation support program. The program operates through the cooperation of both these departments, which recognise that

drug users have difficulty in securing and maintaining accommodation and have done something positive to assist.

The Department of Housing provides funding for a community organisation in Ipswich to enter and manage leases on privately owned homes, and then provide them to drug court participants who do not have available accommodation and might otherwise be in jail. Additionally, the Department of Families, under another community organisation, employs accommodation support workers to provide additional assistance and programs to supported accommodation residents.

This is indicative of the whole-of-government approach adopted by the Beattie government to address drug addiction and its negative social impact on our community. An evaluation of the south-east Queensland trial will be conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology later this year and will assist the government in deciding how to move forward with this important initiative.

I congratulate everyone involved in the program on their foresight and commitment to breaking the cycle of crime and drug dependence, and I urge every member to support the drug court program in every way possible.