



Speech by

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE PROGRAM

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (10.36 p.m.): I would like to take the opportunity this evening to bring to the attention of the House the work of an exceptional group of people, those who make up the Making a Difference program within the Cooloola shire. The Making a Difference—or MAD—program, which has been funded by the Commonwealth government for the past 12 months, was designed to assist the community in developing strategies that will effectively assist in preventing illicit drug usage and in reducing the harm which is associated with the drug problem.

The program has also worked to foster partnerships between all levels of government and the wider community in an attempt to provide a more holistic approach to the issue of drugs in the local area. Whilst I am extremely proud of our local police for successfully carrying out 23 major drug operations over the last eight months, the discovery and seizure of illegal substances are only part of the solution to the growing drug problems within our communities.

Even with \$50 million worth of drugs taken off the market, the last few months have seen no significant change in the supply and demand for drugs. Whilst the police are successfully doing their job in fighting the battle of drugs, they cannot win the battle on their own. There must be support mechanisms such as the MAD program in place so that every aspect of drug culture is addressed.

The only truly successful way of eradicating the majority of drugs is to decrease the actual demand for it. But in order to achieve this we need to understand the who, the how and the why of drug abuse and the information regarding specific types of drugs and their effects. Over the last year the MAD program workers have gathered a comprehensive survey which has managed to achieve this, and the group is now ready to act upon the information obtained by setting up more education, harm reduction, prevention and treatment sites and services.

According to the coordinator of the MAD project, Mari Toner, she is often unable to refer people with drug use problems to treatment facilities either because they do not exist in the area or those which do have excessively long waiting lists. Many individuals and their families are not able to gain access to appropriate treatment—counselling, rehabilitation and diversion programs—away from the criminal justice system.

Ms Toner has described the work she has done over the last 12 months as 'lifting the lid on drug taking in the Cooloola region, looking in and seeing the huge sore of how bad it is and then having had to just put a bandaid over it to cover it'. We should all encourage and support proactive groups such as those associated with the MAD program, because without them the number of families and individuals who are suffering as a result of drugs will continue to increase.

Unfortunately, particularly for rural areas, there has historically been less available information and services, which means parents, for example, have no idea where they can turn, who they should talk to, where they can go and what options are available. To have a family member suffer from an addiction can be a frightening, isolating and sometimes shameful experience which can tear even the strongest of families apart. This is where projects like MAD have been able to have a positive effect on many people's lives by letting them know that they are not alone.

I support and admire the MAD workers, particularly Mari, who has taken on a huge challenge on behalf of the Cooloola community, for the essential service she provides. For this marvellous service to cease due to lack of continued government support would be a genuine tragedy for the people whose lives she has touched and for those she is yet to assist. I implore all levels of government to recognise

the value of drug programs such as the MAD program and provide the assistance necessary to ensure that they can continue so that we may find the answers to why our young are turning to drugs and hopefully begin to reverse this destructive trend.