



Speech by

Mrs Julie Attwood

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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HOMELESSNESS

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.24 pm): I rise to bring to the attention of the House the plight of the young homeless. On any night there are almost 100,000 Australians who are homeless and nearly half this group is aged under 25 years. Young people aged 12 to 18 make up a quarter of those who are homeless. A homeless person is somebody who does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing. This means they are sleeping rough in temporary shelter or boarding houses or are marginally housed with difficulty accessing more mainstream housing. If at census time they are staying with friends or relatives, they may be classed as a visitor rather than homeless, which would mean that there is an underestimation of the number of homeless young people.

Young people leave home due to any number of complex reasons. This may include family conflict, physical or sexual abuse, substance abuse or trauma. Research shows that the main reasons young women are running away from home are: 74 per cent, conflict with parents; 56 per cent, suffering from anxiety or depression; 41 per cent, violence at home between family members; and 27 per cent, personal alcohol and drug abuse and physical abuse.

The Pindari Women's Shelter in Brisbane caters for women between 35 and 45 years and about eight per cent have a mental illness. Services like this continually lobby for more resources to be put into mental health funding as they acknowledge gaps in the system between what they provide and what is provided in our hospitals.

Although there are a number of support services for the homeless, some charity organisations across Brisbane believe that the number of homeless people in the city is increasing. They estimate there are more than 4,000 homeless people in Brisbane with about 400 squatting in the CBD alone. I would like to acknowledge and thank the many wonderful service providers whose many volunteers do a great job providing food, drinks, medical help and, most importantly, a friendly smile to these homeless people.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program—SAAP—is the major response by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to resolve and prevent homelessness. In 2001-02, 1,286 non-government, community or local government organisations were funded nationally under the program. Of these agencies, 37 per cent were specifically funded to assist young people. The fact that 36 per cent of all SAAP clients are under the age of 25 years highlights the prevalence of homelessness amongst young Australians and the need for services to support them. There is a greater need for emergency accommodation to be provided for people to get back on their feet again. Unfortunately, the SAAP program is not nearly enough. More needs to be done in relation to prevention and early intervention for the future needs of this country.

This morning at a QCOSS breakfast I heard three people speak about the United States non-government lead agencies joining forces with government to ensure that finding accommodation for the homeless is a top priority and that much needed services are then provided to these individuals in need. These agencies have proven that the long-term costs of health and other services will be markedly decreased with this type of intervention. We need to examine our statistics on how the effects of being homeless increase the cost of our health system.

A major cause of homelessness remains the difficulty for people who are experiencing poverty and other forms of disadvantage to sustain their tenancy once they have secured accommodation. There have been significant commitments by the state government to increase the supply of social housing and to implement policies to address affordable housing. Our Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology, the Hon. Robert Swarten, and our government are working to address the problem of homelessness. An amount of \$10.5 million is being spent on the continued redevelopment of the Lady Bowen Complex in inner Brisbane which provides short-term accommodation. The Department of Housing also provides funding for a boarding house in Spring Hill and has recently announced an extra \$2 million to fund the leasing of an extra 155 houses and units across the state.

The state government cannot do this alone. We are continually increasing the budget for affordable accommodation, doubling it in the last budget for Queensland, but we have not had that support from the federal government. It needs to work with the states to ensure that any shortfalls in public housing and emergency accommodation infrastructure are catered for, that prevention and early intervention services are provided for these young people affected by alcohol and drug abuse and that the social security system provides adequate support for those in need.

Instead of one party at the federal level criticising the other party at state level for political purposes, we need to think about the people we represent. It is important that both levels of government work together and plan for our future as a nation. Good governments are not about providing stopgap measures or bandaid fixes. They have a vision of how families will be better off in the future and will come together with their actions to ensure this happens.