



Speech by

Rachel Nolan

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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CHERBOURG YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (12.01 pm): Last week in Cherbourg, on behalf of communities minister Lindy Nelson-Carr, I officially opened the new Cherbourg Youth Justice Service. The service, as with the 15 youth justice services and one outpost which have preceded it, has already been a great success. It commenced providing services in October 2006. In its first year of operation the number of young people on court orders in Cherbourg has declined by 40 per cent.

Youth justice services arose out of a commitment made by the then Beattie government in the lead-up to the 2001 election. I have had a lengthy association with them because one of the first services established was in Ipswich. The services offer a range of guidance and supervision to young people involved in the justice system and their families. These include court and bail support for young people facing the courts, supervision of court orders, casework for young people in custody in conjunction with youth detention centres, and post detention supervision and support.

In addition, most youth justice services operate youth justice conferences which bring victims of crime together with young perpetrators and their families or guardians. Youth justice conferencing, whilst derided by those ignorant of it as a soft option, has a 98 per cent participant satisfaction rate because it provides victims with a unique and direct recourse to the person who has wronged them, whilst forcing young people to face up to the human consequences of their crime.

Youth justice services are one of the best examples of this government's commitment to good policy—to doing what is right. We only have to listen to the opposition in here, to pick up a tabloid newspaper or to read the press releases of one of Queensland's increasingly desperate federal Liberal MPs to hear the constant rumble of the law and order bandwagon. Those who are on it say that juvenile crime is out of hand and that we should lock up young offenders and throw away the key. Their calls appeal to the sense of order in all of us.

But the question that must be asked is just what would this approach serve. A youth justice system based purely on punitive measures may, in the short term, make people feel better. It would also, however, institutionalise young people with a group of criminal peers. The first aim of youth justice should rightly be rehabilitation—getting kids out of the cycle of crime. That is exactly what youth justice services are doing.

The figure with which I started—a 40 per cent reduction in the number of Cherbourg young people on court orders—is not a reflection of any change in the courts. It is a reflection of the fact that those young people who have gotten caught up with the law are being actively supervised, gotten into education or work and taken away from the cycle of crime. That is the difficult political work that this government has done in youth justice.

Right now the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 is again under review. The government is again seeking, as the former minister's foreword to the discussion paper says, to ensure the balance between community expectations and positive outcomes for young people. The review will address questions such as the appropriateness of sentencing and diversionary options, the naming of offenders and the high number of young people on remand.

After some months of consultation, the formal period for submissions closed on 19 October. The minister and I thank those people who provided submissions to the review and look forward to ensuring that that balance is maintained with the community in the years ahead.