



Speech by

Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Tuesday, 7 August 2007

COMMUNITY SERVICES BILL

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (5.48 pm): I rise in support of the Community Services Bill, which has been a key initiative of the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations Strategy of the Beattie government. The Strengthening Non-Government Organisations Strategy was launched in August 2005 and a \$26.9 million budget was approved and allocated over a four-year implementation period. The strategy has genuinely engaged the whole of the community services sector and a huge amount of credit must be given to the Minister for Communities, the Hon. Warren Pitt, for that outcome.

The minister is warmly recognised by the sector for his strong commitment to non-government organisations and the delivery of quality services for Queenslanders when they need them most. The strategy comprises a range of collaborative activities between the Queensland government and the community and disability sectors and is being led by the Department of Communities. The aim of the strategy is to look at better ways of providing practical support to the non-government organisations delivering services funded under the Communities portfolio.

In addition to the Community Services Bill, for example, the Building Links Funding program and the multitenant service centre pilots are encouraging sharing and collaboration between non-government organisations and other stakeholders in the community and disability sectors. To date, the Building Links Funding program has provided over \$1.2 million to 45 organisations to develop business case proposals for collaborative activities or to implement planned collaborative activities.

A range of workforce development initiatives is helping to respond to workforce shortages and to skill sector workers to better respond to clients. One of these, the Communities-VET Partnership, is a statewide program that is delivered collaboratively by the Department of Communities and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts. When the program was developed it was expected that over a four-year period approximately 1,000 community and disability workers would participate in a variety of training and development opportunities. Sector workers throughout this project are able to receive recognition of prior learning and work experience, undertake additional training to obtain formal qualifications and develop skills that will help them and their organisations meet client needs.

Figures at March this year showed that 165 workers had completed recognition of prior learning, with 91 of these workers achieving a full qualification through this process. A further 189 workers are currently completing recognition of prior learning in their workplaces. This program is exceeding target expectations as sector workers from various sector occupations embrace the opportunity to have their skills recognised or learn more about the community and/or disability services sector. This is evidenced by the large number of expressions of interest in joining the program—indeed, some 1,150 workers since February 2006.

The Online Resources initiative has seen the development of a web site, the Community Door, which supports non-government organisations with their internal business systems and to improve their service delivery to clients. For example, the web site includes tools, information resources on aspects of management, funding and reporting, as well as providing links to many useful web sites, case studies on collaborative practices and free subscription for three years to Management Support Online, a resource

that provides a comprehensive suite of information, online skills development, tools and resources to help community organisations improve their business processes and service delivery.

The Strengthening Rural Communities Strategy funded by Blueprint for the Bush is another closely aligned strategy for the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations Strategy and is providing grants and support funding with a value of over \$23 million for three years from 2006 to 2009 to help rural and remote communities and non-government organisations. For example, \$5.4 million over three years has been allocated to support consortia of organisations proposing to establish five rural multitenant service centres located in the Blueprint for the Bush catchment area.

Five regional centres—Dalby, Lockhart River, Burdekin, Charters Towers and Longreach—were recently announced as being successful in securing initial funding of \$17,500 to develop business plans for the development of these rural multitenant service centres. Further funding of up to \$1 million would be available to each location to meet the costs of establishing the combined service centre. While these particular measures address the needs of rural and remote communities, the Community Services Bill, as part of the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations Strategy, will provide a modern framework for funding to well over 800 services up and down the length and breadth of Queensland.

In my electorate in the inner northern suburbs of Brisbane, the services attract their fair share of funding. This occurs due to a couple of key reasons. Firstly, our local community has traditionally housed a large number of socioeconomically challenged people. Age pensioners, people living with disabilities, people living with mental illness and families, at times blossoming and at other times surviving despite dysfunction, are all well represented in my electorate as I know they are elsewhere. Secondly, the nature of inner northern suburbs real estate also means that a large number of important statewide community organisations have their headquarters in my electorate. Organisations such as Mission Australia, the Queensland Police Citizens Youth Welfare Association, and the Queensland Homicide Victims Support Group are providing services to communities across the state and have their headquarters in my electorate.

Another organisation based in my electorate but providing an invaluable service to people across Brisbane, particularly in the northern suburbs, is the Young Parents Program. In the next couple of weeks the Young Parents Program will celebrate its 21st birthday. Twenty-one years of supporting teenage and other young mothers is very worthy of celebration. As I am sure many members in the House will agree, having a child is an extremely trying experience for all of us, even when that blessing occurs when we are emotionally, socially and economically ready for it. The young mothers and fathers assisted by the Young Parents Program often are having children in much more trying circumstances, sometimes without the support of their families and almost always without a peer group who can understand their situation. These parents need support desperately. I am sure all members will join me in congratulating the Young Parents Program on their 21st birthday. On behalf of the Young Parents Program, its clients and the whole of the Queensland community, I commend the bill to the House.