



Speech by

Mandy Johnstone

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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SENIORS WEEK

Ms JOHNSTONE (Townsville—ALP) (10.05 pm): On Saturday, 15 August I was privileged to represent the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women at the launch of Seniors Week 2009 in Townsville. The theme of this year's Seniors Week is 'Positively Ageless' in recognition of the importance of a positive attitude to life. This event was a great opportunity for us to reflect on and celebrate the contributions that thousands of seniors in Townsville make to our community.

The Townsville Regional Committee on the Ageing—or TRCOTA—has put together a great seniors program for this year. Activities this week have included intergenerational tenpin bowling, a barbecue lunch at the Upper Ross Community Centre, morning teas and this Sunday a seniors music day on Magnetic Island. The amazingly successful annual Picnic in the Park and Lifestyle Expo was held yesterday at Sheriff Park and, as usual, it was a great success, with over 2,000 seniors attending and with the announcement of our 2009 Seniors of the Year, Mr Ron Piper and Mrs Glenys Davey.

At the function on Saturday I was speaking to Mr Errol Neale, the current president of TRCOTA, who very aptly pointed out that this is a week when we recognise the contributions of both those seniors who are out front and centre in the public eye and those who play a quieter but not less important role behind the scenes. During the morning as I was speaking to the guests attending I asked what they felt were the most important issues facing seniors at present. Two consistent themes emerged: the worrying trend of elder abuse in our communities and the need for support for older people who are raising their grandchildren.

The issue of elder abuse is a worrying one. During my work in the community sector I often heard firsthand or second-hand stories of this disgraceful practice. One way people receive help is from the Seniors Legal and Support Service in Townsville, which is a service that is staffed by both a lawyer and a social worker. On Saturday, several people mentioned this service to me and told me how important it is to them or to someone they know.

Caring for spouses, relatives, children and grandchildren places added pressures and stresses on many older people in our neighbourhoods. Make no mistake about it: this is hard work. Many of these people would not have expected to find themselves in these caring roles after raising their own children and instead would have expected to relax in their retirement.

I would also like to acknowledge some of our older leaders in Townsville, such as most recent past president of TRCOTA, Mr Neville Abbey, and others such as Robyn Moore, Errol Neale, Marge Mills, Neal Ace and Ginni Hall to name only a few, who are examples of how appropriate the Positively Ageless theme is. These fantastic people demonstrate values that I really admire: resilience, loyalty, friendship and connection with community. Nearly always in a volunteer capacity, these people contribute to their senior citizens clubs' gardening and sewing groups, political associations, seniors advocacy groups and the like. I also know for a fact that many of these people continue to inform and contribute to their professional networks.

Seniors Week is a great chance to promote positive attitudes to older people and ageing, encourage older people to lead active lifestyles and foster intergenerational relationships. I thank the organisers for having me involved and I hope that the rest of the week is a success for them all.