



Speech by

Dr Alex Douglas

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

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LOAVES AND FISHES FOOD FRIENDSHIP KITCHEN

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (11.04 pm): Once in a while something truly remarkable occurs and, because it is happening at such a humble level, it often gets missed. In the Gaven electorate, a mixed group of volunteers led by Louise Jennings is feeding hundreds of those who, through no fault of their own, are largely unable to feed themselves, house themselves or build sustainable lives.

Six years ago, Michael Ware and Toni Demmey started this twice-weekly lunchtime meal service. Louise, a neighbour, who is a mother of seven children and on a pension, asked to help. Since that time, thousands have been fed week on week and nightly from Coomera to Coolangatta, have had bread or food delivered to their homes, have had meals prepared for free or have been given food parcels, money or food vouchers to local suppliers. Louise has helped largely through the local St Vincent de Paul Society, although she was not a member of it. She has voluntarily delivered so much to so many for nothing, other than a need to assist and a love of her fellow men and women.

Local bakeries, food suppliers, service station operators, fruit shops and butchers have helped. Each year, they contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stock that might otherwise be disposed of. This group has spawned a neighbourhood barbecue group run by the parishioners of the local St Margaret's Anglican Church. There is a list of volunteers distributing food, food parcels from a food bank and funds to enable the survival of some very needy people. Representatives of Blair Athol, the Department of Communities and Health routinely attend these meals because there are a high number of people who are drug affected and who have mental illnesses. No preaching or brainwashing occurs.

Louise has widened the group meal to take in the needs of the young people in the local Nerang skate park. These Nerang and surrounding district locals have followed the teaching of Christ. Loaves and Fishes has made many whose lives have been challenged a little more tolerable and very happy, and there can be no greater gift to offer. Their actions have triggered actions from others. Another group of volunteers have spent three years, as I said, providing this barbecue at Bischoff Pioneer Park in Nerang. Rain, hail or shine, every Tuesday this group provides a meal with a second course to the very needy of our local Nerang community. All sorts of people come and go at that barbecue, from the genuinely needy to those seeking a friend to talk to.

With our electorate office assistance, they have applied for a Woolworths food rescue grant that will hopefully facilitate the recycling of fresh food that major food stores otherwise dispose of. This food is not past its use-by date. This may make the process sustainable. In a sometimes Godless world, we do not always notice how many are not just talking the talk but walking it too.

It is a great credit to our community that the efforts of volunteers are able to do so much for so many, and they want to do more. The Meals on Wheels group, the Red Cross, the CWA, the senior citizens group together with the Loaves and Fishes group are merely just anonymous people serving anonymous citizens. Without any fanfare, the Nerang Neighbourhood Centre has delivered the same sort of service. Every day of every year all these groups live by a motto—

(Time expired)