




Speech By
Michael Crandon

MEMBER FOR COOMERA

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015; YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2016

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (10.10 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 and the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. My focus will be on the proposed solutions for the issues that every jurisdiction has with regard to young people who find themselves in the youth justice system. The broader community has expectations of our young people and, for the most part, remain tolerant of those who stumble. For the most part they are open to the idea of giving our kids a second chance or a third chance or possibly even a fourth chance, but tolerance wanes when they see repeat offenders being given slap-on-the- wrist punishments, and that is what this bill proposes again.

Those opposite have thrown out the programs that were implemented by the LNP without giving those programs time to see if they could work, and that is just wrong. That is just poor planning. That is just 'de-Newman-ising' the legislation out of spite, and that is a mistake. We have a situation where there are no plans to resolve the fundamental issues. All we are doing is reinstating something that did nothing for recidivism in the past, and reducing recidivism is what youth justice conferencing was designed to do. Having young people face their accuser means that they will understand the impact they have had on another person, but do they understand, act on that understanding and turn away from their past ways? The evidence does not support that. It may have an effect on a few, if we have caught them early enough, but what about the 10 per cent of offenders who represent 45 per cent of all proven offences? That figure can be found in the Childrens Court 2014-15 annual report. Do members really think youth conferencing on its own is going to turn them around?

The statistics provided to the committee for the 2014-15 financial year tell us the number and percentage of distinct young people with at least one proven offence that was finalised in that year. They are provided by age group and also the total number. There is no need to go into the different age groups here, but the totals are interesting. With regard to the comments made by the member for Beaudesert, in fact it is 10 per cent of one of the subgroups that he was referring to. There were two groups but, as I say, there is no need for us to go into the detail of the different groups at this point. However, they are interesting. The totals refer to young people from age 10 through to 16. The total number is 3,495 young people and the number of offences committed by them that were finalised was 23,350. That is an average of 6.7 offences per young person. Clearly, some offenders would have been responsible for one offence. Based on the earlier figure of 10 per cent being responsible for 45 per cent of offences, it means that around a total of 350 of these offenders were responsible for around 10,500 offences. That is 30 offences each. That brings the average for the other 90 per cent of the offenders down to around four each and of course, as I said a moment ago, if we delve deeper we would find that some were responsible for just one offence.

Looking across the spectrum, there would be some of them who may be persuaded by the youth justice conferencing concept but, given that there is no evidence that there was any measurable reduction in recidivism, they would be few and far between. By the way, yes, there are other benefits to youth justice conferencing. Evidence suggests that giving victims an opportunity to face their offender has, in some instances, had a positive impact on their wellbeing and that is a worthwhile outcome, but at what cost? What we can do? I think there is quite a bit that can be done, but it needs a complete rethink on the way we are doing it. We need to look at the fundamental causes and work on them with the young people who are coming through from younger ages and at the same time work with those who are in the system now.

What do we need to work on? What is the range of issues that we need to deal with? It is what I refer to as the AEIOU issues. If we just keep offering easy outs for our young people, particularly those who are already well entrenched in the system, without resolving the fundamental issues around their behaviour, we will just see so many of them repeating the offence or going on to bigger and badder things.

Mr Byrne interjected.

Mr CRANDON: Why don't you just listen, Bill? This makes sense. Just have a listen to it. The Attorney-General is having a listen to it. You listen to it too. Recidivism in our younger generations runs at around 60 per cent. What do I mean by that exactly? When our young people first come to the attention of police and the courts, we quite rightly go easy on them and, as I said earlier, that is possibly where conferencing may be of benefit to them. We give them an opportunity to correct their ways. It is a first offence, so we are going to give them a warning. The reality is that we see many of them before the courts again for a second offence or several additional offences 60 per cent of the time within 12 months. In my view, we most certainly should not keep on giving them that easy out through conferencing time and time again. It just will not work with many of these recidivists, so we have to address the underlying issues or we will never reduce recidivism.

That is where the AEIOU that I referred to earlier comes in. The A stands for accommodation. In my research and discussion with people working in the prison and parole system and the people who work in the provision of programs, I found that this most basic need—accommodation—is perhaps the most important one to resolve. If these young people are in the wrong environment, then the chance of them offending again jumps significantly. There is all manner of reason why where they live causes or contributes to their recidivism behaviour. They may be in a dysfunctional family environment. They may have been kicked out of home by parents who are at their wits' end or simply do not care about them anymore. As such, they may be physically homeless or be couch surfing with friends. Once they go through the justice system, they find it even more difficult to find accommodation and so the recidivist behaviour increases.

E is for education. Depending on how the measure is taken, and there are a few different tests used, somewhere between 15 per cent and 40 per cent of people in the prison system are identified as illiterate. It follows that similar results can be anticipated in the young recidivist group. I will talk later about an alternative education program that is making great inroads into turning young people's lives around.

The I is for integration. Some talk about reintegration into our community, but the reality is that many have never been properly integrated into society. They have never been taught right from wrong. They have never had a positive role model that stayed around long enough to make a difference. We see it in the way many young recidivist offenders act and act out.

The O is for occupation. Working in a part-time job when young and working for a living when you move into adulthood becomes more difficult for people with a criminal record, so we need to develop programs that assist young people into work—young people who have been through the criminal justice system. We need to develop training programs that provide them with basic skills. It is not as easy as it sounds because the first thing that needs to happen is a change of attitude in the young person. The saying that you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink comes to mind. The idea that a young person can be forced to do a particular program or face a harsh penalty just does not cut it. Once again, I am aware of a program that I will talk about later if I have time that is motivating young people to take another road.

The U is for understanding. That was the basic purpose of the boot camp concept—not to punish but to give participants an opportunity to contemplate what could be a different road for them to take and to learn from others. By trialling various programs and ideas that have worked elsewhere, the boot camp concept could change lives. Putting young recidivist offenders through these sorts of programs gives society an opportunity to instil in them an understanding of how to act and react in certain circumstances, an opportunity to teach them coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills, to

demonstrate to them what is acceptable and what society expects of them, giving them an understanding of what their choices—right and wrong—can lead to. There may be room for conferencing but surely not for repeat offenders and certainly not on its own. We have to back up conferencing by addressing the whole range of issues that affect young recidivist offenders.

The other night in my adjournment debate speech I made a brief mention of a program that is perhaps the answer to three aspects of the AEIOU, if not more. Members may recall that I talked about a school in my electorate that has a 98 per cent pass rate. It is a school with an 81 per cent attendance rate of students who could not manage to attend 10 per cent of the time in their previous schools. At the end of 2014 and 2015, 100 per cent of the university-bound students at that school were accepted into their university courses. These are second chance students. Forty-one per cent of graduating students re-enrol into the college to continue with further study.

This school has credentials that are the envy of many. In fact, members may recall me saying that just one week ago—on 8 June 2016—*School Improvement Review* was quoted as stating that the school review on this school was the best improvement review it had ever done. This school is Eagleby Learning Centre, which is now known as the South East Region Learning College. This is a unique school with unique qualities and dedicated educators. The school's vision statement, 'Success starts here' is based on the premise that everyone is entitled to an education. The South East Region Learning College—or SERLC—is leading the way in alternative education by challenging traditional methods of education delivery so that disenfranchised, disengaged and even formerly ineligible students have the opportunity to access education with real success.

SERLC has become the exemplar of an alternative education approach by delivering a range of quality state secondary education and certificate courses in a flexible manner and, most importantly, successfully to second chance learners. It uses what is termed the flexible learning alternative EQ model—yes, it is an Education Queensland school—that was developed right in the heart of Eagleby in the north of the Coomera electorate. In fact, the Eagleby Learning Centre has been around for many years annexed to the Beenleigh State High School. From my observation and feedback, I can say that the ELC bobbed along with minor success for some years before transforming into what it is today by visionary and dedicated educators who saw the need to develop the alternative model and dedicated themselves to ensuring that it succeeded. This is just the beginning. With campuses now at Eagleby and Varsity Lakes, the 'Success starts here' vision, underpinned by the flexible learning alternative EQ model, is a resounding success.

I am keen to see other campuses develop as well—initially up and down the Gold Coast and then throughout Queensland. This flexible learning model could be rolled out for the types of young people we are talking about now—those who are in the youth justice system. In fact, there is a perfect opportunity to develop another campus at the Coomera marine precinct right now, with the old TAFE facility available and ready-made for the flexible learning alternative EQ model. The Coomera marine precinct is a working marina and is the largest in Australia, with a total workforce estimated to be around 3,000. The precinct is ready to employ school based apprentices. With a new boat manufacturing facility under construction, the need for apprentices there is soon to grow even further.

As for this alternative school model, I know that the need is there. I see it in my region, as I am sure others see it in their regions. What is the process that students undertake? This is where I see the school responding to most of those AEIOU issues that will benefit young people in the youth justice system: education, integration and occupation.

Upon enrolment, the students are introduced to the SERLC concept and understanding of success and grit and the vision statement, or motto, 'Success starts here'. In that regard, the school wants to impress on students that success is as individual as the student and individual students can succeed. Every student gets a one-on-one interview and a personal timetable that outlines their program. This process also helps to define the student's goals. Importantly, those goals may range from simply concentrating on attendance initially, then building to focusing on their individual pathway to further study or employment. The school stresses that what success means will be different for every student, but graduating with a pass will be one success that is part of the program's fundamental priorities. Students must be focused on passing.

SERLC staff have the luxury of a small school environment, allowing all staff—both non-teaching and teaching—to form meaningful relationships and build trust with students like no other education facility. This view has been expressed to staff by students and it has confirmed their ability to deliver meaningful, holistic outcomes with data to support the successful outcomes. All of that is important in changing the views of these young people. I am told that the entire staff at SERLC acknowledge the sheer grit and resilience that the students display on a daily basis simply to be there. Students face

numerous challenges in their lives and often their education is not prioritised as they battle other obstacles for mere survival. That is what I alluded to earlier in terms of the AEIOU. Accommodation is very important to these students.

SERLC recognises the incredible feats that the students achieve despite the odds. In the event of an exceptional student who has achieved despite incredible odds, the college honours them with their True Grit award. This is an acknowledgement at the school graduation ceremony of the individual conquering incredible barriers to achieve their goals. For these people who have not been able to be at school for more than 10 per cent of the time in their previous schools, that is an incredible barrier to have conquered.

What do we have? We have second chance learners. They are the folk we are talking about who end up in the youth justice system, because they drop out, or they are kicked out of our mainstream schools—and, on many occasions, for good reason. They are taken out of the system, because of safety issues in relation to other students and in relation to people who are working at those mainstream schools. Learners from all walks of life who were disengaged, disenfranchised, or formerly ineligible—and that includes many recently released from custodial sentence and who are possibly on parole or on probation, or in the youth justice system—are determined to graduate with the help of teachers who care, recognise and acknowledge difference with advanced programs that have been proven with a 98 per cent pass rate. That is not a given to them. The students have to earn that 98 per cent pass rate. The students learn to step up to the plate, develop goals for themselves and ultimately find in themselves the resilience and tenacity to turn their lives around through an alternative education program.

In making the changes that the Attorney-General is determined to make, I ask the Attorney-General to make a change in the way in which she deals with young offenders. I ask the Attorney-General to develop programs that will provide answers to the AEIOU issues, which are the root cause of failure for so many young people, which are the root cause of them being on the recidivism merry-go-round. If the Attorney-General does that, she will be changing the lives and saving the lives of young people in the youth justice system, the lives of their families and other loved ones and the lives of others who love them. The communities they live in will also see a difference through less crime.