




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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ADJOURNMENT

Mackay, Choir Performances

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (7.20 pm): Recently Mackay was treated to a weekend of exceptional choirs. The Gondwana Voices, a choir of young people from across Australia, was developed through the work of Lyn Williams OAM when she created the Sydney Children's Choir in 1989. The choir has a reputation for being of the highest standard for young people not just in Australia but also internationally. I would recommend everybody to visit the choir if it is in their community.

The choir's performance in Mackay, at the historic St Paul's church, was all the more special for our community because we got to see one of our very own students perform—Ellen McCusker, a member of the choir. Ellen is a local student attending Holy Spirit College. She trains and travels with the choir, adding richness to the choir. We are very proud of Ellen and the commitment of her family to allow her to follow her love of singing.

The second choir we were treated to the following day was the very same Choir of Unheard Voices that performed previously at parliament. It is 10 years since its formation. The choir supports adults in the community who struggle with mental illness. Many of them are living in seclusion. The choir is a means of external pursuit and engagement and fulfilment for its members. The choir has progressed beyond simply learning songs to perform in public to its members writing their own songs, running workshops and supplying some of the musical back-up at performances. The choir is made up of amazing people who bring joy and happiness to audiences. They are also an inspiration. It is evident that they have all had struggles in their lives, and they are still able to proudly and professionally entertain others.

I will share some of the voices of the choir with members. Tracy was one of the first members. At first she did not want to be seen—she hid behind, not wanting anybody to see her—but now she sings by herself. She has written a song about herself, her life and her struggles. She said—

We all sing some songs that make us cry. We are family.

Dean also joined in 2008 after watching a video of Choir of Hard Knocks. Dean has been very unwell over the years and has not always been able to sing. He said—

No matter how sick I get, the choir still inspires me to participate. I feel welcome and it gives me comfort. One day I hope to write my own songs about love and life.

Kathleen said—

The choir has kept me out of the mental health ward. We are a good source of support for one another.

Since joining the choir she has learned to play the bongos. The choir members are supported by a strong, caring group—

(Time expired)