




Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (11.56 am): My community tells me that kids need to be held accountable for their actions, and I agree with them. When we discuss and debate youth justice, community safety and community confidence are paramount in those decision-making processes. My community wants us to address this issue and we are committed to doing just that. When I talk with people in my community they recognise the best way to address youth crime issues is where it starts—back at the family level.

When retired general Stuart Smith was doing his community consultation in Townsville regarding youth crime the overwhelming response from my community was that they wanted to help solve this problem. They want to be the village that raises a child—every child. Most of us know that raising kids is one of the most difficult things we can do, but through careful guidance, nurturing and discipline we take our kids through that difficult time of the teenage years. If members have not got to that point yet just wait.

In my former role it was no different. Guidance, nurturing and discipline was a good start in building those crucial relationships with students as they moved from fresh-faced year 8 students to young adults in year 12 who would drive to school. In my experience, kids have changed over the last 30 years. How kids are raised has changed as well. What we did 30 years ago does not work in today's society.

About 12 to 14 years ago when I was principal of Townsville State High School I ran a boxing program for 15 students who were constantly truant and on those rare occasions when they attended were always in the office for their behaviour. The boxing program involved students going to a PCYC with me every Wednesday afternoon and learning how to box right beside me. At the end of the eight-week program they got into the ring and went a few rounds with me, their principal. They were the luckiest kids in school, ever.

Conditional for them learning to box was that they had to attend school every day, and we set targets for reducing their behavioural issues in class each week. We saw dramatic improvements in their attendance and behaviour. We fed them breakfast every morning. They made their own sandwiches for lunch. They met with the guidance officer who gave them strategies for working with their teachers in their classes. I met with them every second day to check on their progress and gave them feedback. We worked with parents on making sure that they were ready for school and could get to school and, if not, we would pick them up from their home or aunty's place.

This program got national media coverage because of the work we did in engaging kids in learning. More importantly, we worked with their families to engage in school. This was thinking out of the box back then. This was building relationships with kids who had large instability, even trauma, in their lives. This was about addressing behavioural issues immediately and supporting students to improve their behaviour. It was about breaking the cycle of bad behaviour and disengaged learning.

My community tells me, and Major General Stuart Smith and Bob Atkinson, that kids need to be held accountable for their actions, and I agree with that. My community also recognises that we need to break the cycle of crime back at the family level because if we do not this problem is only going to get bigger and bigger. Building more youth detention centres is not the answer, and that is what my community tells me.

Like the boxing program, kids need feedback on what they have done wrong. They need support to make the changes to their behaviour. Just telling them what they have done wrong alone will not change this behaviour, and this bill addresses that. When we look at our children no two are the same. Therefore, a cookie cutter approach to solving youth crime is not the solution. There needs to be a raft of different solutions that break the cycle of crime. My community are seeing change, but there is way more to do—working with children, families, schools, the justice system, police, health services, housing and the wider community, the village, who want to see youth crime reduced. The member for Burnett said in his speech in this debate yesterday—

The goal with juvenile offenders should be to move them through a pathway toward full engagement and return them to normal society. People are much more useful as citizens and taxpayers, fathers and mothers and all the rest of it than languishing in jail or in a detention centre or watch house and remaining on the margins of society.

I could not have said it better. Let us start to address the causes of crime before they end up as juvenile offenders in the first place. Like the boxing program example I used, we will continue to research and develop different strategies to get the results my community wants us to achieve, not use the same old methods and expecting different results. We want kids to be held accountable for their actions, and the community has told us that the best way to do this is through early intervention at a family level. Stop it before it starts. Do not wait for it to happen and then act.

This bill is but one piece of a much larger puzzle. We have our blueprint which Major General Stuart Smith and Bob Atkinson developed by listening to what our community wanted. We are now implementing that blueprint. That is what we are doing, and this bill is an example of some of the future work that we will need to do as well.