

HANSARD

House of Representatives

19 November 2009

Mr SULLIVAN (Longman) (12:34 PM) —The federal government has announced its intention to develop a national strategy for young people and to include young people in the development of that strategy. This is happening principally through the Australian Youth Forum, and it is the Australian Youth Forum which recently held its National Conversation. We want Australians to grow up healthy, safe, happy and resilient and to have the opportunities and skills they need to learn, work and engage in community life and influence decisions that affect them.

The ability of young people to have an influence on decisions that affect them is important and earlier this month, on 9 November, I hosted a forum of local young students in order for them to be able to contribute to the National Conversation. For the forum we brought together young people from high schools across my electorate. It was facilitated by an experienced but young facilitator and she was assisted by other young people. The schools that were represented were Bribie Island State High School, Caboolture State High School, St Columban's College, Tullawong State High School, Morayfield State High School, Deception Bay State High School, North Lakes State College and Northpine Christian College. In all, 36 students attended on the day. It was a great opportunity for them to get together and have a say on issues that they feel strongly about and have an input into the national strategy. Most of these people had never met before. For those not familiar with the Longman electorate, it is a combination of a number of separate communities that are gradually being subsumed into the broader area of outer Brisbane.

I was greatly impressed by the thoughtful and articulate way in which the students discussed the issues and put forward their ideas, which I believe bodes well for our future. Much of the discussion focused on obstacles which prevent young people from being active in their community. The delegates identified practical ways by which young people can engage with the community and ways the broader community can engage with our young people. Some of the obstacles they identified were negative stereotyping of young people and lack of support for young people to create their own opportunities. The delegates prepared a communique for the National Conversation, which I would now like to read on their behalf. It says:

Local young people need support from the community

We need financial support to mount our own projects and activities locally

We need to be encouraged and mentored by adults and the community generally

We want to be acknowledged for our value

We are seeking advice and support on life skills and direction

We are seeking guidance

As young people we need to participate in and generate more community events that celebrate young people, youth culture and help foster acknowledgement of the positive contribution young people make to the community

We are seeking more support to help young people achieve their goals through our own actions and events

Young people should have a say on subjects that affect young people and we need to be active in pursuing opportunities to do this.

Outcomes

We propose a continuing local youth forum or youth council supported by existing institutions like local government. The council would be made up of young people and provide:

Youth planning space for young people to meet, network and create change

Allow young people to have a say on subjects affecting young people

A youth focused magazine or publication that provides a voice for young people as well as providing positive views on young people

I am very much looking forward to continuing to work with these young people to help them achieve these goals. In fact, I have had some preliminary conversations with the Deputy Mayor of the Moreton Bay Regional Council, which is quite a large council area. Between us we have decided that the best option for our council area is to have not one but three such youth councils, which would take in many of the young people from the electorates of Petrie and Dickson, which adjoin us to the south. It is important to note that young people are very much conscious of the negative stereotyping that they get in the newspapers and I would like to conclude this contribution with a few lines from a poem by Denis Kevans, who spoke of this problem as an ex-teacher—and newspaper writers should take note. The poem goes:

If you could look into their eyes, as I do every day

You wouldn't write the things you write or say the things you say

You wouldn't put these children down and bruise their tender pride

And hustle little bits of kids on the paths to suicide.