



**OLDER PEOPLE
SPEAK OUT**

OPSO ACTION RESEARCH 2000 – 2005

“Their voices are heard ”

Now who will listen?



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Preface

The OPSO Consultative Research Forum is made up of people who share a passion for social justice, including academics, business people, professionals and a State-wide network of friends and associates.

This report is based on 15 years of action research across the State.

We consult with communities to establish their needs and solutions and then work with them and government, as well as business and the media, to put these into effect in a timely fashion.

Some government departments today, like the Department of Transport and the Department of Police get the OPSO Tick of Approval. They listen and they act on what they hear.

So does the Office for Seniors. However, it battles with gross under-funding and a lack of understanding by government number-crunchers of its real role in an ageing society

The proper role of an Office for Seniors should be co-ordination and evaluation of all policy and practice on ageing across every government department.

While OPSO's primary concerns are, as our name indicates, the total well being of people 55 plus, our action research is by no means limited to this group. People of all ages, including Years 10, 11 and 12 students have been consulted individually, in small groups and in community representative Speakouts throughout the last 15 years. This report covers what the people have told us in the last five years.

While the work is primarily Queensland sourced and the recommendations are Queensland focused, there are applications in States Australia-wide.

**“It is the prudent government that hears its people.
It is the wise government that heeds its people.” (Anon)**

Introduction

For the last five years the people have spoken. The main aspects of the ideal community they desire, and that we therefore need, are set out below.

The Dream:

1. A community in which there is no age or youth discrimination; a society in which the community drives social policy and where the community recognizes all types of families;
2. A community, which offers genuine Statewide facilities for expression of opinion on policy, practice and a community where people are not marginalized: where every person's contribution is valued;
3. Integrated planning within the community for the needs of the child, the teenager and the frail aged: an integrated intergenerational community;
4. A fair and equitable public housing system;
5. Nobody living below the poverty line, and jobs where full-time work is defined as at least 36 hours weekly;
6. Inclusion and support for people with disabilities;
7. A fair criminal justice system based on prevention and rehabilitation, not just punishment;
8. Life-long learning as a right, with technology regarded as a tool and not a master;
9. An integrated bus and light rail system that will reduce the emphasis on car travel and
10. Recognition that a budget surplus is valid only when the health system meets community needs.

Compare that dream with the following realities.

THE REALITY OF AGEING

We live in an era where Government can appear to legislate to win votes, rather than for the general good and an Opposition which indulges in personality point scoring rather than proposing alternative policies. At times there can even appear to be a crisis to crisis spending of public money, the placating of the loudest voices that can mean issues important to that large proportion of voters, [42%] of those facing retirement in the next 5 years, and those already retired, receive comparatively little attention. The gross under funding of the Office for Seniors illustrates this.

An example of this is the recent decision to appoint a half public servant to each of the 10 regions in spite of the people's strong support for the Minister's vision for one public servant in each region, backed by a volunteer forum of older people. Somewhere along the way a fine vision for an effective process to hear the voice of the people has been axed by number crunchers. **This vision deserves to become a reality.**

The experiences of most older people are vastly different from those whose decisions affect their lives in vital ways. For instance, government members, heads of many leading corporations, professionals at the top of their fields, are all shielded by their jobs from the nasty surprises that are the everyday staples of ageing. Where seniors simply want security and reliable services in their golden years, the ambushes that lie in wait for them can make their experience of ageing a negative one.

Some studies have shown that, especially for males, retirement can result in loss of identity and networks that they had through their jobs. Their spouses are forced to broaden their everyday habits to compensate. This situation is, however, the beginning rather than the end of the headaches associated with ageing. Some media, and advertising by those who have financial interests in promoting a fear of ageing, perpetuate negative stereotypes of ageing in the community which in turn leads to such social problems as mature age unemployment, physical, financial, verbal and emotional abuse, emotional blackmail, social isolation, feelings of inferiority, depression and even suicide.

For those seeking assistance from government bodies, application forms and processes can constitute a barrier to their access. For example, literature that promotes community services, applications for Home and Community Care (HACC) services, drought assistance, nursing home admissions, Centrelink payments, and for those volunteering, funding grant forms and paperwork, while no doubt well intentioned, are frequently couched in the kind of officialese which may be understandable to their compilers, but which defies comprehension or sometimes even commonsense.

Further, some people in receipt of HACC services complain, "They wash us, they feed us, they (sometimes) clean for us, but what for?" Care must be balanced with access to activities, with an emphasis on those that can give them the opportunity to give something, no matter how small, to others, especially to children. Otherwise they are left feeling that their useful lives are at an end. Outcomes that result from negativity are: potential ill health, premature ageing and elder abuse, depression and suicide.

The following are therefore the chief recommendations to produce positive outcomes for the ageing:

Most people retire without proper retirement planning, especially in how they will spend what could be a longer period than their working life. The psychological and social implications are neither anticipated nor recognised and planned for. It is essential that such planning be introduced across the State, together with planning for tapering of employment into part-time work. Proper planning will assist positive ageing, and at the same time reduce the problems of depression and social isolation faced particularly by men, who often retire leaving behind the social networks they had at work.

Older people across the State maintained that they should be represented by older people on advisory committees, never by younger paid staff. They called for forums of volunteers to be set up in each region (bigger regions with different interests and needs like the Townsville to Mt Isa one with half a forum each) backed by a full-time public servant, with the chairpersons sent to a central Ministerial Council four times a year. This ensures consultation across ALL the community.

Authorities should note that positive ageing begins in childhood, when attitudes are first formed. The significance of positive ageing is undervalued at all levels of government policy and planning, and therefore insufficient funding is directed towards appropriate projects for all ages. Longitudinal studies show those who age positively live healthier and longer lives. It should be regarded as the “core” of society, financially and socially.

Conversely, the perpetuation and intensification of negative practices lead all too often to feelings of self-worthlessness. Incentives should be offered for employers who have policies that encourage employment of older workers, and Job Search employees need to be trained in recognizing the value of older workers. Marginal income tax rates also need to be adjusted to ensure no loss of entitlements for such older workers.

There is a need to address the feeling of self-worthlessness that leads older people to refuse assistance on the grounds that “other people need it more, dear.” Such feelings also lead to elder abuse.

The establishment of SAILS has been a positive step to counter elder abuse. However, permanent funding is required to ensure this service is available throughout Queensland and as most older people are unaware of the full meaning of elder abuse, it is essential that an ongoing public awareness program is instigated that clearly explains physical harm, emotional blackmail, financial exploitation and verbal abuse.

Elder abuse services are not the only ones that need more effective publicity.

As many people do not have good reading habits, forms and brochures should be thoroughly tested for readability in different parts of the State and by people from all walks of life.

Positive ageing projects should become an integral part of political policy and practice at all levels of government, because these can save government money in most issues concerning older people.

In line with this, it is essential that the States encourage the Commonwealth Government to review the single age pension rate. While married pensioners share big costs, a single

pensioner struggles in poverty. There is little chance of healthy positive ageing on a single pension today, with high rates and home repair costs, or high rents and the maintenance and running of a vehicle to enable them to be active in their family and community.

Funding for HACC services should also be maintained at a level to provide its current and potential clients with adequate services to keep them out of institutions and provide a decent quality of life.

More HACC funding is needed to allow frail people to remain in their own homes if they wish. At the same time, adequately funded and properly run nursing homes are needed where nursing home care is essential.

As the majority of older people assert they prefer to remain in their own homes – the cheapest option for the government- far more funding also needs to be put into Home Assist Secure to ensure that those people are able to stay put. The program needs to ensure scope for local innovation and creativity by local managers to involve volunteers, retired tradesmen, school volunteer and Work for the Dole participants.

Intergenerational Conflict

There appears to be some resentment from the 30-45 year old generation who think that their taxes are paying for the older generation's income. However, the older generation has actually paid for its own pensions through a Social Security levy imposed on them during their early working lives. The fact that it eventually became part of Consolidated Revenue does not mean that the payments ceased, merely that following generations remained ignorant of its history. This situation should be made public.

The huge financial contribution that the 60 plus make to the community through caring, unpaid work and volunteering, both formal and informal, needs to be promoted to counter any suggestion that older people are a financial drain on the community.

To further combat intergenerational conflict, there should be emphasis on the whole community. School projects involving youth and older people are detailed throughout this report.

THE REALITY OF GENERAL HEALTH AND AGED CARE

While governments follow the fashion of running their budgets at a surplus, many urgent needs of health and allied care, and of other aged and disability services, are simply denied adequate attention and funding. For instance, the well-being of many older people often depends upon their remaining within their own homes, secure within their own communities. To do this, many require quality assistance, yet the shortage of allied health workers, Home Assist Secure and HACC staff has reached crisis point.

In rural Queensland there is an acute lack of professionals in most branches of the health care professions, not only doctors, both specialist and general practitioners, but also nurses, medical assistants, occupational therapists, health carers and other ancillary workers. The shortage of dentists is acute. Health professionals told us in the far south west it is possible to wait up to a year for assessment from the one occupational therapist to have a rail put in the bathroom. In another town a health worker wept in pity and frustration for the plight of some of her clients.

There are frequent reports that hospitals place undue emotional pressures on relatives/carers to take into their homes incontinent and non-weight-bearing patients, or those with dementia. These carers thus become trapped into full-time caring. It is a policy that is not fair to patient, or to carer.

Medicines in western Queensland are often more expensive than in coastal cities. Some westerners find necessary medications have become unaffordable.

In rural Australia, wheelchairs are in short supply as are other aids and equipment.

It should also be noted that pregnant mothers who live outside cities have been compelled to have their babies at the closest hospital hub, rather than the nearest hospital. No doubt the high rate of liability insurance is one factor here, but this is a situation that places at risk children remaining at home, and separates the mother from the husband and family at a time when she most needs their support. The additional costs involved in staying in another town at those times impose a further financial burden on families. If this policy is to continue, it must include means-tested free transport and accommodation to ensure those having babies in rural regions have the same costs as those in the city. The family costs of this present policy can put mothers and babies of low-income families at risk if their family and financial position precludes them from coming to town.

The following recommendations are made to improve the realities of health and aged care:

In general, there is an urgent need to provide fairer allocation of funds to provide appropriate services.

There is an obvious need for a substantial package of incentives to attract health professionals to rural and remote areas. Among these incentives should be higher salary scales, tax concessions, distance allowances, study opportunities, decent housing and transparent pathways for career advancement. Career pathways need to be accessible as well to partners of married professionals. More bonded university places are needed in regional areas.

Older retired professionals could also be encouraged to return to part-time work and to act as mentors. In addition, there is a need to provide some kind of local training to acquaint newly arrived professionals with the specific needs of their community. Also (though this may appear to be something of a contradiction to the above) particular care needs to be given to the selection of these professionals. They must be able to demonstrate their medical and communication skills and qualifications, but also show their suitability to work the long hours and the capacity to make the independent judgments that are often required in these areas. There is grave concern that overseas trained doctors have been appointed without having passed a national AMA test or without being able to make themselves understood by patients.

An increase in specialist and allied health services, especially dentistry, is also a matter of the highest priority in the west and north.

Videos showing the advantages of rural town life should be used during final years of university and throughout the health professions to attract young graduates. Work experience in rural and remote areas should be offered during their final years of training. Funding should be allotted to remote towns to provide welcome activities for new professionals and their families.

Greater financial incentives need to be offered to keep older people in private health funds, such as no-claim bonuses. Public Liability Insurance costs need to be addressed to ensure health services can be available locally. Older people in some acute-care situations could thus be treated locally, supported by their familiar surroundings. Women could have their babies within their own localities.

Private hospital staff indicated that the same regulations should apply to public and private hospitals, which should be under the one section of the Department of Health to ensure consistency of practice and the well-being of their clients.

A complete review of the methods of allocating nursing home beds is an urgent priority. Shortage of beds and severe overcrowding need to be rigorously examined and remedied. Nursing homes need to offer a choice: many people prefer the companionship of a shared room, providing it is big enough for privacy and personal space; others want a room of their own. What is more important is the need to give residents tasks that make them feel they can still give to others, such as being able to make small gifts for children who come to perform for the residents or who bring gifts on Mothers Day, Easter and Christmas.

An urgent need exists for a review of funding priorities for Allied Health, HACC services and nursing homes; e.g., small areas like Bribie Island have special demographic needs and fall through the cracks in regional needs surveys, missing out on the advantages of the Special Needs designation.

Many services could be made more effective by the introduction of intergenerational projects in which teenage school pupils are enlisted by older volunteers to help carry out these services. This can help bring a feeling of community identity and responsibility. Junior Neighbourhood Watch and Junior Home Assist programs would be excellent innovations and could be used to ensure frail aged people living alone are not in need of help. This can be done by phone, or by a signal left out each morning or afternoon. Social isolation is a major problem for many recipients of HAAC services. One way to involve isolated people in the

community is to have Meals on Wheels bring them into neighbourhood centres where they can have their meals with other people once or twice a week.

One solution to the shortage of equipment came from people in Mt Isa, who advertised for old wheelchairs and remade them, often using discarded garden chair seats. So that materials are not wasted, other towns could provide work sheds for older people where not only wheelchairs could be remade, but furniture, cars and toys could be rebuilt by older people and school children working together to raise funds.

Medication must be cheaper and more readily available in all areas. Better access to free medical and surgical supplies, e.g., wheelchairs and walkers, with no time delays, is a vital need. Support should be given to programs that recycle equipment for re-use in most areas – already there are such programs in some places.

Medical staff need to fully understand the stressful situations they place carers in by making it difficult for them to assert their real feelings and to say “no”. When the carer takes on full-time caring, both carer and caree become trapped at home often in unhappiness and frustration. This could be prevented if there were more day and evening respite centres and home services.

The whole system of treating people with mental illness needs to be re-developed. At present the burden of care falls too often on relatives with insufficient medical back up. Many carers told us that only constant reporting to police gets adequate recognition of need and treatment.

Closer monitoring of mental illness cases living in the community needs to be a priority. Too often the lives of families are destroyed because one of their members cannot receive adequate treatment.

Policy and practices need to be developed and acted upon to cover the needs of the mentally ill person when their primary carers are too old to care for them or have died.

HACC funding should be directed to low-health needs to keep people out of care and to help them remain socially active. More HACC funding is needed to allow frail people to remain in their own homes. Social isolation is a major problem for many recipients of HAAC services. Care packages for people with disabilities should not draw upon funding designed for packages for the aged. It is common practice to place people with long-term disabilities into aged care programs as there is nowhere else for them.

Provision needs to be made for a system to obtain quickly those medical supplies, including medications that are not routinely held locally in rural areas.

Nursing homes need to have more flexible bed allocation for residents. A weekly part-home and part-nursing home program would allow carer and patient the best of both worlds. This could allow in the nursing home the rostering of one bed for two patients,

A return to availability of convalescent facilities should be encouraged. Shorter hospital stays which often see carers carrying a heavy burden of high-care, are undesirable. Such a facility would provide an opportunity to allow carer and patient to gradually move back to a more appropriate situation, preventing unnecessary re-admissions to hospital..



Social workers are needed to provide adequate post-hospital assessment and ensure the delivery of home services especially to those who live alone or have an aged spouse. The lack of appropriate step-down accommodation and after-care generally needs to be addressed throughout the State.

Grassroots quote:

Why not no-claim bonuses for the 55 plus as an incentive to remain in private health insurance...the last rise puts it out of reach.

THE REALITY OF GRANDPARENTING

While most of this section applies specifically to grandparents who are raising their grandchildren in lieu of parents, some of the following recommendations apply to grandparenting in general; some important matters are touched on below. They require attention.

Early intervention into dysfunctional families can reduce child abuse. Parent training for grandparents caring for grandchildren and a cohesive intergenerational community can reduce the need for child protection agencies. This should be the chief aim in the new Child Protection Department.

At the same time, legislation should recognize that grandparents have rights of access to their grandchildren, not only that grandchildren have rights of access to their grandparents.

Research into grandparents looking after grandchildren for long hours while their parents work has shown a higher rate than normal of heart and back problems. For these grandparents and for full-time relative carers there needs to be appropriate and affordable child-minding facilities to give them respite. Leaving children with grandparents for long hours beyond their mental and physical coping strength, with little or no time for themselves, could be regarded as elder abuse.

Emphasis needs to be placed on parent training and updating of parenting skills of grandparents involved in the parenting role.

Grandparents bringing up grandchildren outside the Department of Child Protection need legal recognition of their status and an allowance equal to the Foster Care Allowance. They need such benefits as will guarantee specific education for children with special needs and access to trauma counselling. Funding needs to be given to research into the emotional needs of these children and their grandparents and appropriate services set up to deal with the results and findings.

Issues that remain unaddressed:

1. Peter Wellington MP is raising a private member's Bill to try to get similar payments for grandparents who are raising grandchildren full-time as those currently available to foster carers. This payment would assist grandparents to maintain a suitable standard of care for their grandchildren. There still appears to be no movement from the State or Commonwealth Departments towards addressing this issue.
2. Some Legal Aid issues may be resolved under changes to the Federal Family Law Act which is under review. There has been no indication in it that special assistance would be made available for grandparents though closer study of the final document may have some indicators.
3. The setting up of a helpline for grandparents was considered in 2002 during consultations but so far nothing has been done about it. Some projects have received some funding from the Commonwealth Government for information strategies but these have largely had a purely local focus.
4. Crisis care and access to respite areas is needed. In larger centres precedence is given to existing clients and there is a certain reluctance to acknowledge that grandparents

need respite, especially when raising children with challenging behaviours that result from parental drug and alcohol abuse.

5. The development of a network of peer support groups for grandparents has been hindered by the total lack of resources in most areas. The formation of a State-wide peak specifically for grandparents should be a primary focus for government. The existing Council of Grandparents should be resourced to take on this role as it has been working collaboratively with a number of groups and services to establish itself without resources over the past 18 months. It meets once a month and has the capacity to distribute a newsletter by email, which would be used to inform grandparents about assistance and resources available to them. There is little evidence of a concerted effort by the State government to develop a network of professional service providers to assist grandparents.
6. The development of two Departments to address children's issues has further disadvantaged families who do not fit the category of reported abusers but who still need support from the Department as primary providers. A case in question is the issue for older parents and grandparents who need support to care for their disabled children; the Department response has been to deem them unfit and take over the whole role instead of providing the requested support.
7. Fear of losing their grandchildren if grandparents seek assistance from government services is widespread. These carers are also adversely affected by long waiting lists for much needed general health services provided by the State government.

THE REALITY OF TRANSPORT

Most northern and western towns do not have local bus services. Lack of or a shortage of local transport is, however, endemic throughout the State. Without these services, the well-being of the community is restricted. High school students are often unable to attend sports training and social activities after school and in the evenings. Families find it difficult to provide transport from nearby properties and within local towns because of the hours people work in rural areas. This has a detrimental effect on the well-being of younger people because it restricts their social activities.

In bigger towns and cities, lack of suitable transport deprives adults, teenagers and disabled people of the opportunity to develop and enjoy appropriate social networks. Moreover, although many older people have bus services to respite centres; this service does not meet other equally important needs. The lack of co-ordination of trains and buses, as well as the expense involved in air travel [if available] contribute to the isolation of people in the west and north.

Where local medical specialists are unavailable, many people do not have access to either public or private transport to enable them to travel the long distances to the nearest hospital hubs.

The following recommendations are made to improve the realities of transport:

Current emergency services need to be expanded, developed further and properly equipped. For instance, ambulance cars, rather than fully equipped ambulances, could be used to provide transport from local and outlying districts to hub towns, hospitals, etc. The fully equipped vehicles, suitable to local conditions, should be reserved for major emergencies.

At present, school buses, HACC and booze buses in small communities are not used to their full potential. They could also be used to pick up teenagers after school for social and sporting activities. Also, the more extended use, where available, of taxis, maxis and small feeder buses could augment these services

The Patient Transit Scheme needs to be reviewed, expanded and more fully subsidised. Plane travel for patients could replace unacceptably long hours of bus travel.

In the cities, transport should be developed around hub services with taxi buses on call as well a system of feeder buses. Kneeling buses and lifts at all transport stations are essential.

To decrease the volume of traffic on metropolitan roads and highways a cheap and environmentally friendly aboveground light-rail system built on pre-fabricated pillars could service Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Train concessions need to be available for interstate travel and full Seniors' Card and student discounts should operate interstate.

A rational system of road sealing is needed, for example from Cairns to Hughenden and the Reef to Rock Townsville link. This will help develop tourism and connect north Queensland with southern centres so as to lessen interstate road-train and heavy tourist traffic on coastal highways.

Older drivers

Regulations relating to physical and mental fitness to drive should apply to all members of the community - not just to seniors. People at any age can have a disability that can have a detrimental effect on their driving. Anything else is ageist. Ageist attitudes in the community lead to most of the abuses against older people, including mature-age unemployment, elder abuse, social isolation and suicide.

Recommendations:

All drivers with a diagnosed disability that could affect their driving must produce a current annual medical certificate before their licences are renewed.

People of any age involved in serious road accidents, or who have lost all their points, should be required to undergo a licence test to re-assess their capacity to drive. An incentive of reduced registration fees for points-free licence holders could encourage more people to drive and ride safely.

Because overseas and interstate tourists pose a significant problem on rural roads, drivers towing caravans should have to pass a special licence test.

Youth Road Safety

Road Safety was discussed with Year 11 and Year 12 students at a cross-section of schools in the south-east, central, northern and western parts of the State. It is a major issue for teenagers in regional areas because of the high accident rate among their peers, particularly on straight country roads.

Teenagers in the west do not have the opportunity to learn to drive from registered driving instructors. They learn in the paddocks either by themselves or from friends and family at an early age. They go onto the roads with no professional training and, realistically, with no experience in driving in traffic.

They are concerned at the high rate of driving under the influence of drugs by their peers. They also maintain that lack of transport options at night often means taking a lift they would prefer to avoid because their driver is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

They say that this problem has not been properly addressed by school awareness programs or by police on the road. Year 11 and 12 students urged that pupils in all schools from Year 3 onwards should be made aware of the dangers of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Present drug-awareness programs are not hard hitting enough, and are begun too late. It is not, they said, a matter of warning teenagers about the dangers of driving under the influence. By then, it is often too late. Students at any time could be passengers and should be aware of the dangers of drivers on drugs when they have no option other than to accept lifts.

Recommendations (unanimously from across Queensland):

Year 11 and Year 12 students in all schools stressed the need for driving courses to be held after school, in holiday breaks or during sport periods in school hours to ensure all Queensland teenagers are professionally trained. They suggested that retired people could be trained to provide interactive driving courses at all school levels.

Road Safety courses are also needed in all schools from Infants to Seniors classes because of the numbers of students who are driven to school and do not develop pedestrian skills. Older people trained in road safety could give these courses as part of the policy to make children pedestrian-wise.

Many urged the wider introduction of 'walking buses' where young children are delivered by parents to one street corner and then walk to school in a supervised crocodile.

Advanced or Defensive Driving Courses under all possible [simulated] conditions could be required for students to be eligible for a full licence test. Trained retired people could also have an active role in this scheme.

Students also agreed that penalties for drug driving should perhaps allow for one warning. There was some disagreement about whether a warning should precede the loss of a licence for a year. They believe money fines hurt parents rather than teenagers, and the loss of a licence should be imposed instead.

Students also suggested that after 6.00 p.m., while drivers are on Provisional licences, they should carry only one passenger. All agreed that travel at night was a big issue. They questioned the morality of providing booze buses for adults drinking at pubs while teenagers in general have to rely on family — often unavailable or not interested — or their inexperienced friends for lifts home, often in over-crowded cars. They suggested courtesy buses in city areas, and for rural areas, a volunteer pick-up service, using family cars, HAAC buses, or school buses.

Students also believed car insurance should be cheaper for the young until they have either had an accident or committed a driving offence.

Year 11 and Year 12 students would also like to see reciprocal public transport student fees between States. The high cost of public transport interstate means young people have to take an offered lift or walk in circumstances that they know are undesirable.

General Road Safety Recommendations

Because overseas and local tourists pose a major problem on rural roads, those drivers pulling caravans should have to pass a special licence test.

There is also a need for white lines that register sound on both the verge and the centre of the road to prevent drivers falling sleeping at the wheel.

Compulsory speed signs at roundabouts should be introduced, consistent throughout the State and signed accordingly. The suggested safe speed is 40 kph.

There is still a problem with the height of vegetation in roundabout gardens.

Throughout the State there is a problem with shrubs and overhanging tree branches on private property obscuring the view of speed signs and entry into another street.

Where subsidiary roads enter main towns or suburban streets or country highways, signs indicating the required speed on the main roads should be painted on the minor road where it meets the major one.

Wavy lines on roads just before pedestrian crossings to warn drivers they are approaching the crossings should be restored.

The Queensland Transport Department, together with other Departments, local councils and the community, need to work together to establish feeder services to train and bus hubs, and also to plan for services to connect suburbs across a city/town as well as to the CBD.

Students generally believe that integrated bus and light rail public transport planning needs to be developed across the State as a first priority. This would reduce the need for cars in inner city areas and suburbs and reduce social isolation at all ages in towns as well as cities.

The Patient Transit Scheme needs urgent review: to be modified and made more flexible to suit individual needs. The long journeys, the cost of overnight stays because of return journey timetables....It's too much for sick and frail people.

THE REALITY OF CRIME AGAINST SENIORS

Part of this problem is seen to arise from the growing dysfunction between youth and age, and especially in the attitude of some older people towards the young. Community and media stereotyping of young and old is particularly unhelpful.

The general response to this problem was the need to promote the positive behaviour of youth and the contribution and diversity of older people, and to involve both groups in working with schools and the community generally. This would include after-school classes in car repairs, cooking, crafts, and furniture making.

More police presence is important for the whole community: walking patrols in day time in shopping centres and malls could be a role for volunteer police in their distinctive uniforms. There has been a significant drop in the ratio of police to population in some areas. This needs to be reconsidered, especially in line of growing populations in southeast Queensland.

Adopt- a- Cop programs have been well received in primary schools for many years.. Police are introducing school-based officers in high schools but numbers of community police and youth public relations officers could be significantly increased.

Media programs showing intergenerational respect and activities could be sponsored by the government. There also need to be media programs illustrating positive interaction between police and all sections of the community.

Recommendations:

Elder abuse in the home — physical, mental and financial — needs to be recognised as a crime. Publicity campaigns explaining what it is, condemning its cruelty and advertising sources of help would alert both young and older people to its existence. Low-cost personal call systems for people living alone could be a means of making them feel more secure. Local safety audits should be made of older members of the community, asking whether they feel safe, if not why not; and what would make them feel safe? Also young people could be asked how we could make everyone feel safe.

Volunteer youth services to be set up in schools to go out with volunteers to help deliver Meals on Wheels, visit nursing homes and, in particular, work as members of a Junior Home Assist project or a Youth Neighbourhood Watch. High school students and older people could work together to set up suburban venues for kids to hang out, arranged like the old milk bars, and in fact, some of the venues could be located in disused ones. Computers could be installed in these venues.

Most people interviewed want a more cohesive society. In the west, people in many of the towns acknowledge the cohesiveness of their communities and point to the low crime rate as an outcome. They believe the interaction between youth and older people helps to promote this. In southern Queensland, this needs to be taken into account in strategies for the prevention of crime. Money put into development of intergenerational activities would be well spent. Such planning will provide for social and recreational activities for all ages.

Change the public image of the police by stressing the human being inside the uniform. Show police as representing help and safety rather than as a system of punishment; such moves could help break down fear of The Law in both schoolchildren and older people. Subsidiary reforms here could include setting up a Volunteer Police Reserve to work in schools and with older people.

These volunteers could wear uniforms with a distinguishing mark on the sleeve. Training these people to interact with students and older peoples' groups about safety in the street, the shopping centres and the home would help promote the human side of the police image to both young and old. Positive police stories in local papers could be used to build up the image of the force as a source of help. Billboards with photos of police helping kids and older people could help enhance this friendly image of police.

Use Crime Stoppers ads on television to explain how to live in secure surroundings, and to promote the police as sources of help to everyone. Campaigns like this one should stress positive intergenerational interaction.

Employ more community police: **THIS IS ESSENTIAL**. Set up more Blue Light discos, and police promotion of sporting and social activities in which older people too can become involved; this could result in developing more community goodwill, especially if the older ones arrange for club courtesy buses to take kids home. The present financial burden of Blue Light Discos needs to be removed. They are faced with a dramatic increase in insurance cover; in turn, the entry price is forced up, making it too expensive for families with more than one child.

Use volunteer police as resources to get intergenerational projects going after school and in school holidays. Activities could consist in part of role-playing, such as road safety scenarios, sport and drama. Volunteer police could assist in the setting up of youth branches of organisations like Rotary, Lions, Quota and Apex.

Government ads can be devised to show older and younger people doing things together like canoeing, biking, fixing a car, playing Trivial Pursuit, debating, and surfing. Government, councils and service clubs need to be far more pro-active in setting up school holiday activities, courses, and centres, thus helping to lessen crimes such as arson. Councils could fill a need by providing safe, patrolled places for kids to hang out and/or play games. Local businesses sponsorship of school holiday camps would enable everyone to take part instead of just those whose parents could afford to pay the cost. After hours use of schools by community groups would lessen vandalism and give pupils and citizens a feeling of ownership.

Art or writing competitions, perhaps sponsored by the local newspaper, on the subject of community safety, could involve the police.

Emphasise further use of strategies that get the victim of a crime and the guilty person together, with the aim of agreeing on appropriate restitution, either by money earned by the perpetrator, or by working it out in jobs for the victim or for a person or a charity nominated by the victim. This could be one way of preventing repeat crimes, especially in young offenders

THE REALITY OF EDUCATION

Education in its broadest sense is the dissemination of knowledge of all kinds. Such dissemination should encounter no age barriers. While numerous consequences no doubt flow from such a generalised claim, here the focus is placed on two chief areas.

One area is – within OPSO's ambit of concern for the total well-being of the older person – some of the ways in which older people can benefit from continuing education. The other – and this is the chief reason that this category immediately follows the category of crime -- is that any measures which will reduce the incidence of crime against older people and, more broadly, benefit the community as a whole, could begin within the structures of formal education.

Many of the recommendations that follow stress the necessity of very close collaboration between secondary and tertiary students and older people, as a way of integrating two important segments of local communities. One important element recurring in many of these recommendations is the use of school buildings outside school time, particularly in rural areas. It is here that many of the recommendations could founder, unless the two government departments involved, Education and Employment and Training can put aside all potential rivalries and agree to work together for the greater benefit of the people as a whole.

Students outside southeast Queensland are facing major problems. One major problem is how lacking in awareness most secondary students are of the huge variety of university and TAFE courses available. There is a need to ensure that detailed information on the range of available career options is used appropriately and wisely by all schools. This material should be as automatically available to every Australian student as it is to overseas students. The futures of children in the north and west have been affected by many years of drought. Special financial assistance is needed to give those children opportunities for further education. The difficulty of accessing pre-requisite subjects for future studies by Distance Education or IT when email is not always efficient can be frustrating and distressing.

Recommendations:

Every locality should make available to its citizens of pensionable age a basic course which outlines to them all their entitlements, and provides detailed assistance with the filling in of appropriate forms. Since the most logical place for these courses to be offered in rural areas is the local school, collaboration between all relevant government departments is needed. It would also be appropriate for a representative of the Open Learning Institute of TAFE to attend these courses at least once to indicate:

- a) the range of courses offered;
- b) encouragement to take up these courses and
- c) the need for a survey of the community as to what further courses might be appropriate in the future.

In addition to these provisions, the State should consider the idea of reforming part of the now defunct Department of External Studies (which was administered by the University of Queensland, but need not necessarily be in any revived form), to service those seniors who are not able to attend an urban college and who wish, for example, to learn a foreign language

or other university level subjects, but not for credit towards a degree. Such subjects should not be as stringently demanding as degree subjects. An external version of courses offered by the Institute of Modern Languages would be appropriate.

A brief survey of enrolments in TAFE courses in southeast Queensland compared with those in the north and the west tells a similar story to the one faced by students outside the southeast (outlined above). At Southbank TAFE, approximately 5% of its 25,000 students are of senior/retirement age; the Open Learning Institute of TAFE (OLI) has approximately 1% enrolment of seniors in the north and the west, amounting to roughly 150 students. Yet in the age group 45-54, OLI enrolments in those areas are 18%.

At another city TAFE with a number of campuses, the number and percentage of enrolments of seniors in hands-on courses would appear to be much higher. Numbers are difficult to gauge with any certainty, however, as these Adult Community Education courses are non-credit courses which do not request the ages of participants. Among the reasons for the disparity between country and city could be a migration of seniors to coastal areas, or a loss of interest in continuing education, possibly because of the nature of the subjects offered in distant areas.

Technology needs to be used as a tool and not as a master in attaining knowledge. Furthermore, with the current widespread availability of IT technology, it should be possible for the OLI of TAFE to do more than offer formal courses in a plethora of subjects. The OLI should also be able to act as a kind of clearing house between those who wish to acquire a specific skill or follow up a specific hobby, and those who are available to teach such items. This service would require little more than keeping a register of those who possess the relevant skills, and matching them with those who want to learn them..

Within the schools themselves, a holistic approach across the curriculum is necessary to develop individual children's abilities through local community projects, promoting the child's physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and social well-being. In order to build a more integrated community life, school curricula need to incorporate life skills and should be linked to community work experience with current affairs, citizenship and child-care subjects compulsory. The basic aim within education should be to have the school system equip students for living as well as working.

Safe and equal access to education for everyone, specific to each person's needs is a requirement, with a student performance program to encourage parents to attend P & C meetings and have input into school policy and practice. A marketing/public relations team is needed within the Department of Education, to publicise all new school projects that involve the community or individual groups, tradespeople and professionals, volunteer groups and local businesses.

Schools should be a hub of the community in order to promote a sense of involvement for both students and community and they should be used day and evening throughout the year for community and school activities. Schools should be encouraged to develop community renewal projects that will involve students from the beginning so that they will feel a sense of close personal involvement in the finished project, e.g., development of a children's park. One vital example: because of the high rate of road accidents among teenagers in the north and west there must be an emphasis on safety and the preservation of human life in all school curricula.

Road safety courses, training for driver licences and defensive driving courses should find a place in the school curricula at all levels. Because of the shortage of medical assistance in sparsely populated areas, first aid courses should be compulsory in rural and remote schools.

As part of the teaching curricula at all levels, teachers should involve appropriate people from the community as guest speakers.

Apprenticeship exchanges would enhance both city and country students' training and opportunities. The introduction of trade courses throughout Queensland high schools would need to be based on the availability of local training resources. Nonetheless, every child should have the opportunity to get a trade or go to university and not be limited by where they live. Moreover, the Group Training Australia scheme of sharing apprentices clearly needs to be further developed in these times of critical skills shortages. While there are shortages in a number of areas, the administrator of this scheme in Central Queensland (Bundaberg/Gladstone) has reported an adequate number of apprentices all happily employed. Clearly this is a model to be followed.

Students and adults alike maintain that school-age students are too young to make decisions about their academic career futures. This whole system needs review. Perhaps a course including general first-year subjects for all university students would give undergraduates a broad set of options.

To ensure that local youth have job opportunities, graduating Year 12 students could be bonded to government for a limited period and paid a living allowance and fees paid during their university or TAFE education. After all, the privatisation of many institutions and activities formerly funded by government is one of the chief reasons for the drying-up of the stream of apprentices. Bonded students could then return to work in their hometowns for a set period after graduation.

A contract system needs to be developed between students and householders, which allows for "bartering" of household services in return for accommodation near the education facility. Many students are unable to attend Years 11 and 12 or tertiary because of the high cost of accommodation. Further, business and professions need to insist that work experience be a part of all university and TAFE courses at undergraduate level.

Most students leave school with little knowledge or understanding of the original owners of the land. Optional classes on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages need to be introduced and their history and culture included in other appropriate classes.

School and university courses should not rely solely on information technology to supply material for any course or subject. Personal interaction between student and teacher, and student and student is the basis of sound learning. A requirement for all courses is that they will have at least a summer school element. Teachers need to be given study leave for at least a semester every five years to upgrade their professional skills.

There should not be pressure exerted on high-achieving students to take up medicine or law to the detriment of their own career preferences for other professions such as teaching.

This model is a special instance recommended for consideration; it integrates school and community:

The model features a teacher who wishes to involve the community in many aspects of his/her teaching. Under this model, if a school decides to adopt a voluntary group: the Art class will design a logo and posters; the Commerce class will design the stationery; the English class the flyers and write the minutes of meetings; the Social Science class will outline the aims and objectives to meet local needs; the Accounting class will keep the books and produce financial reports; the Home Economics class will make promotional T-shirts; the Maths

department will carry out statistical surveys, Media Studies will promote the group's activities and the Manual Arts group will make products for sale to raise money.

It is essential that the young can feel they are really involved in decisions made about their quality of life. Candidates for youth councils should run campaigns and ensure all young people know of the existence of the council and are able to have input. This program should be linked into school civics and citizenship courses.

The demise of the little local newspaper is killing communities. Let's get the kids running a local news sheet for the community and have older people contributing. And what about an intergenerational radio programme on local radio?.

We need more teachers and fewer teacher changes.

Education is basic and fundamental.

It is up to us to elect a government for all and expect them to provide it.

THE REALITY OF HOUSING

There is an emerging crisis across the State in housing, especially for those at the lower end of the economic scale; many of these are people trying to get by on minimal pensions. The housing crisis can thus affect many older people; limiting their capacity to continue in communities they have resided in for many years.

Recommendations:

Government departments and local councils need to work together towards shared solutions, to save money and facilitate co-ordinated government practices and outcomes.

Government, councils, and communities need to plan for a realistic and equitable approach to land use, which recognises intensive inner- and middle-city housing needs; it is especially urgent to formulate plans for the next 20 years.

Government needs to legislate for rental assistance to be tied to income and local market rent in a system that addresses high living costs in some areas, e.g., Cairns, Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast.

Government needs to investigate ways to develop systems that encourage more capital investment in public housing. There is a need to recognise that public housing is the most cost-effective way of providing affordable housing. Rental assistance in its current form does not meet the increasing social costs of rising rents in the private sector. In this regard, they should also investigate the possibilities of utilising large-scale prefabricated housing in a variety of acceptable designs that are eco-friendly and attuned to their locations. (A number of people have pointed out that many present building practices are underpinned by nineteenth-century ideas and attitudes.)

Following this recommendation means that State governments should strongly advocate, and lobby for, more public housing of various types across the State, rather than accepting the Federal choice of the payment of rental allowances to those on low incomes.

The present practice of selling off to developers some of existing public housing stock and land bank properties should be reversed. Instead, appropriate maintenance and upgrading where and when necessary should be provided. Infill could be employed where houses currently occupy large blocks of land.

Government should initiate a more appropriate home or home equity purchase model to allow people some capacity to escape the rental cycle and dependence on government support.

Planning Issues:

Higher density housing should be encouraged in inner city redevelopment with open common use areas in addition to existing parklands. The strong move towards old-fashioned community living would see intergenerational housing developments that would allow people to live first in a family home, move to a smaller home then to a unit all within the same development. An existing example of this concept may be seen at Kawana Waters.

Community houses should be built in groups, with village green designs so that children and adults will have communal gardens and space to play.

Expansion of community gardens is needed, so that individuals may have their own plots. The police should have input into the designs, which would not only facilitate their role within the community, but also ensure safer communities.

To build rental units and retirement villages for older people in small towns is a good community solution to keeping retirees within their own social networks. Old hotels could be re-developed into old-style boarding houses, which would suit many older single people who say they would prefer this style of living. In many instances, this idea also has the advantage of providing accommodation close to the hub of things.

In cities the concept and reality of retirement village living needs to be reviewed. Many older people who want to go on working but do not want to have the problems of maintaining a house are looking for a flexible form of living that will provide meals, cleaning and other services which leave them free to divide their time between work and entertainment.

For convenience and cost saving, low-cost rental villages for older people could be built on top of shopping centres, which could also provide meeting rooms and community recreational centres.

Retirement Accommodation Issues:

There appear to be three markets for retirement villages: for the independent retiree looking for resort living; for the older person keen to keep on working but not keen to worry about maintenance, gardening, and even the evening meal; and the third, for the frail but independent aged. These people have different needs and the market needs to recognise this.

The number of rental villages that do not offer meals as part of their rental costs needs to be increased. Many people spoken with in the north and west would like this option as they believe the meal component is expensive and places that particular accommodation beyond their means.

Design Issues:

The establishment of boarding houses for the homeless, older people, people with disabilities and others who may prefer this model would fill an urgent need.

Further development of group housing like the Abbeyfield housing model needs to be more seriously considered.

Government, councils and members of the community need to increasingly design innovative and step-down housing models for people who need extra assistance in daily living.

There should be emphasis on such adaptable housing design such as Universal Housing Design which is adaptable to changing family needs, e.g. children, the ageing, people with disabilities, and teenagers. Local government should focus more on promoting housing design which provides for natural cooling and heating, thus reducing power use and costs.

Emphasis should be placed on such designs, which protect the environment and resources through grey-water recycling, the use of solar energy, natural light and rainwater tanks.

Support Issues:

A major unmet need is home maintenance so that people can remain living independently. Home Assist Secure is an excellent program but cannot meet the demand. It could be widened to incorporate Work for the Dole and intergenerational school programs, which would assist older people and people with disabilities with home maintenance. Older retired tradesmen could re-enter the workforce in special programs of peer support to assist older people maintain their homes.

Public housing needs to be better maintained in suitable locations with sensitive programs for tenant relocation when there is a need for more appropriate accommodation at different stages of life.

Appropriate solutions to assist older people to remain living independently within their community should be developed in partnership with government, service agencies and the community. Serious health issues such as social isolation could then be alleviated.

Developers...giving a little back

There is a general belief that developers should not be allowed to accumulate high profits without some contribution to the local community. There is a need for planning in order to provide the best outcome in terms of land use, transport and services. Government needs to legislate for developers to contribute toward the provision of low cost housing in the area, to housing the homeless, or to integrating a component of low-cost housing into their developments. That legislation also needs to prevent developers from monopolising large areas of land which forces up prices.

This land is ours, not the developers. Nth Queensland farmer's wife

THE REALITY OF EMPLOYMENT FOR OLDER PEOPLE

The value of the older worker needs to be recognised as we move into a continuing sustainable society. Employer-funded ongoing training is a necessity now, and governments need to build this factor into their education funding. In general, however, one of the most contentious issues in employment involves demarcation of responsibilities. It is therefore appropriate to outline the major areas here:

Basic Responsibilities of Employers:

The economic bottom line, the profit margin, is obviously the major focus for employers. Without profits, the company cannot function; there are no jobs. Yet employers need to recognise that the welfare of their employees forms an important part of that bottom line. To ensure that there is equitable welfare for employees is the responsibility of unions (where applicable), governments, management consultants and other job-providing intermediaries, and employer groups themselves.

Basic Responsibilities of Employees:

The nature of employment is changing. Fewer people remain in the one job, or even a related job, for life. To meet these changing needs, flexibility is the key: flexibility of attitude, of qualifications, of location. Recognition of this need has to begin at school. What also needs to be inculcated at school is the changing nature of an employee's loyalty. If the employee's first responsibility is to his/her work (they need to be faithful to their knowledge and training in order to do their jobs), then it must also be to their present employer who looks after their welfare in terms of wages and conditions.

While older workers are limited in the range of tasks they can undertake there is an exceedingly wide range of areas in which they can continue to make significant contributions — economic and social — to the community.

OPSO's Older and Wiser pilot project clearly shows the interest that many employers have in employing older workers. One of the major problems was Job Search who, employers and unemployed alike maintained, was not sending on older workers for job interviews. What is needed is both a campaign to educate the community about the value of older workers and special courses for Job Search workers on the importance of utilising older workers.

Recommendations:

Adequate studies need to be carried out into the areas to which older people can contribute. If this has already been done, it is unknown to OPSO. The results of such studies should be promulgated among employers and potential employees alike, as a chief tool of education. Some areas of the workforce already contain a sizeable proportion of older people — politics, skilled professions, senior management, service industries, small business are examples — yet other areas traditionally regarded as belonging to younger generations could well absorb older people. For example, the armed services and home-based businesses.

One suggestion that recurred frequently was that job-sharing would enable older people to continue working beyond retirement age. Strategies to put this system in place need to be introduced now. Similarly, programs need to be established in disadvantaged districts for older people to assist and educate young workers. Employers need to be educated in the pros and cons of employing older people. This is the responsibility of government, drawing upon the data of the study proposed above. The questions of working hours, overtime both paid and unpaid, need to be addressed initially through education rather than regulation. The advantages of job-sharing between young and old, and mothers with young children, need to be demonstrated.

If so-called apprenticeships/traineeships can be expanded to include university and TAFE students, this could be one way of reducing HECS fees.

Also, programs need to be established to enable retired public relations professionals to mentor groups like Neighbourhood Watch which find it difficult to be heard when their members do not have marketing, media or lobbying skills.

Legislation is needed to prevent unpaid overtime being worked by employees at any level already working more than 36 or 40 hours. Such legislation would lead to a better quality of family life, less worker burnout and therefore less early retirement, paving the way for job sharing, needed as the population ages.

Legislation is needed to ensure early-retirement education, embracing emotional, social and financial planning.

Government should recognize full-time work as being 36 hours and over.

The corollary of flexibility in employees is collaboration between businesses, and between businesses and government departments, business and the community and government departments and the community.

Until this objective can be fully met, employees may need to undergo several periods of retraining in their working lives. Where this is not an upgrading of qualifications, the expenses must obviously be met by a combination of employer bodies and governments. Retraining need not always be the product of a more flexible workforce, however. Some people could simply move sideways, if their movement were facilitated by some private organisation or government body. Examples? Retrenched supermarket manager begins house-washing business; 66-yr-old becomes limousine driver; retrenched hardware store manager buys country hardware store.

Local business and professions should adopt students doing university and TAFE courses, bonding them for five years. This would cover fees; living allowance and work experience and in rural and remote areas solve the problem of parents being unable to send their children away for a higher education because of drought hardship.

Volunteers are not recognised for the work they do. They do essential work for the community, but are seldom paid expenses, and their organisations are striving to survive in an environment of red tape and Public Liability Insurance. Volunteering needs to return to being uncomplicated, valued and enjoyable and carried out in a happy and rewarding atmosphere that will encourage younger people to join in.

Communication between volunteers and government needs to be reviewed. Further, communication between government and those eligible for government relief, particularly

benefit forms, are overdue for review. These are seldom easily understandable because of their poor readability levels. We were told many people go without drought relief because of this barrier.

All communities report a common need: Public Liability Insurance is destroying the community's ability to function adequately in every aspect of community life, including employment. The government would do well to consider the New Zealand Public Liability Insurance System. Or is the power of lawyers and insurers too strong to tackle?

Because labour will be scarce, there needs to be a balance that will guarantee equal rights and responsibilities for employees and employers, with equitable contracts in terms of working hours, conditions and overtime. Salaries as well as working hours for top administration personnel need to be capped, and involve no unpaid overtime. Incentives need to be built into contracts to encourage staff, especially managerial staff, to stay in their jobs. Incentives also need to be offered to good trade workers to stay in their jobs and to upgrade their individual skills and productivity. Managerial staff in the Health and Welfare field particularly need to demonstrate broad fieldwork experience before appointment.

Industry needs to offer a flexible range of workplace options, and individual and group productivity needs to be rewarded.

Benefits of productivity need to go to employee teams as part of their contracts.

Core skills need to be encouraged before specialisation, and there needs to be far more emphasis on better training for non-academic job aspirants.

Working from home by small and medium businesses needs to be encouraged by using new technology that allows for face-to-face communication and teamwork. More support, both financial and educational, needs to be made available to help people establish home-based businesses.

Many people living in the Outback believe the development of 'hot rocks' as an alternative energy source will bring industry to the west, enabling decentralisation of industry and providing a source of employment for their youth and for the community. This means the opportunity exists for employment equity between the west and the southeast corner.

The older generation of cattlemen need to have the opportunity to study the advantages of diversification. One of the problems today is that younger people study modern farming methods, but are unable to put them into practice when they return home because the older generation owns the land and is not always prepared to change.

Community project officers need to be appointed to assist in pre-retirement planning and with the development of community facilities to prevent social isolation and suicide at all age levels.

Training in collaboration needs to become part of all school and tertiary education systems.

Industry and professions need to be encouraged to develop and offer pilot scholarship bonding schemes based on the payment of tertiary fees, work experience and living allowances with five years' work bonded after graduation.

Incentives need to be given to employers to develop workplace options such as job sharing, encouraging the employment of older workers and young mothers.

Broad fieldwork experience needs to become a prerequisite for all managerial positions in relevant government departments.

Schemes need to be developed to encourage input of ideas from employees at all levels. Being given a share of the results of their productivity brings to the worker a sense of ownership, loyalty and belonging.

Questions of working hours and paid and unpaid overtime need to be addressed, initially through education rather than regulation. As unemployment drops, this could well self-regulate. Apprenticeships, expanded to include university and TAFE students, may be one method of meeting higher HECS fees.

There are also areas where Government action with private enterprise (Public, Private Partnerships) could change or enhance employment patterns, e.g., decentralisation of industry, development of 'hot rocks' and other new technologies, avoidance of waste, red tape and duplication of effort, particularly between levels in government and separate departments of government.

Women in the Workforce:

As they age, because of divorce, widowhood or preference, more women live alone and are dependent on their own financial resources. The reality is that most women have very small amounts of superannuation, if any, because of broken career patterns due to childbearing, and their caring role. Women spoken with over the last five years have been anxious about their financial security as they age. Workplace reforms are necessary to ensure family-friendly policies such as job-sharing, home based work, carer's leave, flexible hours, and if we are to encourage women to have children, adequate child-care with flexible hours and government supported fee structures for lower income workers.

Government and employers need to recognise that in an ageing society with a low birth rate there is an urgent need for significant changes in the workplace. There is a need for innovative work arrangements that can help balance work and family/caring responsibilities, and for continuing education and training for women at all ages and stages.

Women maintained that when they spend time out of the workforce to have and care for children there should be strategies in place to ensure they are not penalised in their career opportunities or in their superannuation arrangements.

OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN:

All relevant legislation needs to reflect the huge differences between the far west, the far north, central, southern and southeast Queensland.

There is a need to give more decision-making power and much more money to the regions to enable them to meet local needs, according to local knowledge, rather than have decisions dictated by Brisbane. This devolution of political power would need a commensurate movement of public servants to spend time living and working in the regions and listening to the people. Regional government officer positions would need to be upgraded to facilitate local decision-making. The present regional divisions are not working, according to people living in the far north and west. They should not be linked into one division stretching from Townsville to Mt Isa, because the differences in needs are so huge, the needs of the west tend to be ignored.

One of the most disturbing discoveries in some of the larger towns is loss of local newspapers. To help generate harmony between generations and to ensure community communication in those rural areas, school age and older volunteers could produce a newsletter that serves a similar purpose. Where there is a newspaper, school students could be given a special section for young people's news.

University research needs to be made available to the community to assist with informed comment on government policy, particularly that research which is done on behalf of government and not made public.

Recognition through awards should be given to politicians and public servants who, without gate-keeping, listen to and act upon the voice of the community.

Decentralisation of industry to rural areas should work hand in hand with integrated planning by all appropriate departments, including Transport, Health, Housing, Education, Recreation, Families, Police, Employment and Training, Emergency Services and Industry.

In areas north of the Sunshine Coast, small settlements are being developed with no concern for the cost of infrastructure on local councils and ratepayers. Legislation needs to be enacted to prevent local councils from being sued by landowners if they refuse them permission to subdivide in inappropriate areas.

WESTERN SURVIVAL

To ensure that Queensland takes full advantage of the diversity of the whole State as an overseas attraction, tourism needs to be developed throughout the west and far north, instead of just the Barrier Reef and the Gold Coast. In this way small outback towns will survive. Local, State and Commonwealth Governments need to collaborate to seal all major roads and provide funding to develop the tourism infrastructure that will allow this to happen.

The dinosaur fossils in the Richmond and Hughenden areas need to be promoted with the help of Queensland Tourism to create a Mecca for tourists.

Innovative ideas from progressive local communities to improve their sustainability, e.g., water, sealed roads and tourism, must be encouraged and facilitated by all departments.

Blanket environmental regulations cannot apply across the whole State because of huge regional differences in climatic and soil conditions and agricultural practices; they therefore need to be flexible. To ensure this flexibility, all legislation pertaining to the protection of the environment needs to be closely monitored to ensure just outcomes in individual circumstances.

The mega-millions of litres of water that flash by northern towns into the Gulf in the rainy season should be dammed to ensure survival of the local communities. Only a four-per-cent flow is needed to ensure diversification of primary industries. There can then be intensive farming of 50-acre lots in the rich volcanic soil. The dams will be an asset for tourism; for instance, the benefits of Lake Argyll to the Kimberley region — the product of the damming of the Ord River.

Farming using hydroponics is already being practiced effectively by some property to produce food. This initiative needs more developmental assistance.

The Community wants the Government to help develop resources. Public servants fly in and out and speak with us...but so often they do not listen.

