

DISABILITY JUSTICE CENTRE — CAVERSHAM

**568. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Premier:**

The Premier recently attended the opening of the nation's first disability justice centre in Caversham. Can he please explain to the house the significance of this centre?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:**

I thank the member for the question. Indeed, I was pleased to attend the opening at Bennett Brook of what is this state's and Australia's first disability justice centre. I congratulate the Minister for Mental Health, Hon Helen Morton, for her perseverance and her sense of social justice in putting this in place. I am also very appreciative of the supportive words of the Chief Justice at the opening.

It is a fact of our system that a proportion of the prison population may have committed and probably did commit an offence but who, because of their intellectual disability, were not able to face trial and therefore were never convicted of an offence. Indeed, a number of these people have remained in the prison system longer than they would have done if they had actually been tried and convicted of an offence—they are just left languishing in our prison system. The facility built at Bennett Brook is worth seeing by anyone who is interested in mental health and justice issues. It is innovative in all sorts of ways. It is a prison environment, but when a person goes inside they soon lose sight of those features. It has a small number of dwellings—basically rooms with an ensuite. It can accommodate just 10 people at any one time, but there will be a constant flowthrough of people. For the people who go into that centre, it provides a transition from a prison environment to the community, where they will inevitably end up—as, indeed, convicted prisoners end up being returned to the community in most cases. The centre allows for intensive programs and deals only with people who are assessed to be no threat to the community. Therefore, it is a transition through to the community.

I think a compassionate and just policy has been put in place. It has been very carefully designed and very carefully managed. I understand it has been a contentious issue in this Parliament and I understand and acknowledge the right of local people to voice their objections, but if people go to Bennett Brook and look at the centre, they will see that it is not in the community but is adjacent to a suburban area and set back into bushland. I am absolutely confident that after perhaps two or three months of operation, the community will accept it. I have absolutely no doubt. I congratulate the minister, who showed some courage in handling both public and personal attacks over this issue. She will be vindicated for that courage because of the quality of that facility and the way that it will allow some of the most vulnerable people in our community, who have not been convicted, to transition out of the prison environment and to return to the community.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member for Bassendean has been vitriolic in his personal attacks on the minister and totally insensitive of the needs of these vulnerable members of our community, and you know what? He did not even show up for the opening!

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Premier, I was with my daughter at Princess Margaret Hospital, so you should take that back!

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, that is enough.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, I call you to order for the first time.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, you have made your point.