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**Member:** Mr STONE

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Mr STONE (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today to speak on one of the most exciting aspects of the Northern Territory - our young people. Wherever I travel in the Territory, I am constantly impressed by people's desire, eagerness, optimism and determination to get ahead. Territorians are raring to go and young Territorians epitomise energy and enthusiasm. They are integral to making the Northern Territory vibrant, dynamic and exciting and they should share in the confidence that we all have for the Territory's future. It is important that we value the great contribution of our youth. I believe we should avoid referring to young people as 'our investment in the future' or 'the leaders of tomorrow'. We must recognise that young Territorians are making already, or have made, a significant contribution to our community. We need only look around us to be reminded of the achievements and contributions that young people make to our Territory. Young Territory sports people like Nova Peris, Hamish McDonald, Adrian Burnside and James Swan all epitomise the dedication and commitment required to become world-class athletes. They are an important inspiration for the thousands of up-and-coming young sports people in the Territory.

Craig Inkster and Dean David, recipients of Young Achiever awards in 1996 and 1995 respectively, have both demonstrated that it is possible to be young and extremely successful in business. Julia Quinn, as an accomplished dancer, choreographer and teacher, is an inspiration to the thousands of budding young artists in the Territory and has proved that young Territorians have the talent to be recognised on the world stage. Young people such as Mary Simonato, who received a Young Achiever award for community service for her role with St John Ambulance, and Mandy Leggett and David Radzyner, the Young Territorians in 1994 and 1995, affirm our confidence in young Territorians as vital community members who are prepared to devote substantial time to community service.

The number of young achievers in the Territory is ever increasing. Joe Morrison, Pearly Harumal and Rachel Prior all received Young Achiever awards in 1996 for

their contribution to the environment, to career and to the rural sector respectively. These young Territorians have been recognised publicly for their achievements. However, there are numerous other young people in the Territory who have contributed just as much, but who

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have not been recognised publicly. I am disappointed that I did not have the time to list all these young achievers in the Territory. However, I can assure honourable members that we will adequately recognise all young people for their outstanding achievements as Territorians, and not simply because they are young. I am strongly of the view that it is the responsibility not only of government but also of the entire Territory community to provide young people with positive opportunities to enable them to further develop their skills and talents. All young Territorians can be young achievers if given positive opportunities and support.

In order to provide a framework and impetus for those opportunities and support, I am proud to table the Northern Territory Youth Policy. Before I discuss the salient features of this policy, members will be aware that I assumed the portfolio responsibility for youth affairs in late June. I did so because I am committed to ensuring that the government takes a leading role in encouraging the enormous efforts and contributions of young Territorians within both the public and private sectors. I have established an Office of Youth Affairs to provide a whole-of-government approach to youth issues. The entire Northern Territory government is dedicated to ensuring that the whole community plays a part in promoting and advancing young people. As I indicated, the opportunities and services that the government will provide and facilitate for young people are detailed in the document that I have tabled.

In order to arrive at the Youth Policy, the government has undertaken extensive consultation with groups and individuals in the youth sector. I would like to place on record my thanks to all those young people who have contributed to this document. Without that valuable input, this policy would not have been possible. The policy is premised on 4 basic principles. The first is the opportunity for all young people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, culture or social and economic circumstances, to access adequate and appropriate programs and services. The second is recognition that young people are participants in society, and consequently have a role and responsibility in making decisions that affect their lives. The third, and most important, is recognition of the diversity of young people. Inherent in that statement is the right of young people to be protected from cultural, ethnic, religious, gender and age discrimination. In addition, there must be an opportunity for young people to participate in activities, programs and services without fear of discrimination. The fourth is that, as participants in our society, there should be recognition of the rights and responsibilities of young people. It is important to keep in mind these principles

when reading the Youth Policy.

Five key headings have been identified under which a number of initiatives can be taken by government: celebrating young people, participation and coordination, opportunities for young people, information services and strengthening youth services. Honourable members will be aware that there are many events, programs and services in which the Territory government is involved that focus on young people. These include sponsorship of the Young Territorian of the Year, the provision of Northern Territory government scholarships for both university and vocational education and training, sponsorship of the Northern Territory Sports Award, support for Junior Police Rangers and the Parks and Wildlife Junior Ranger Programs, sponsorship of the Northern Territory Literary Awards and sponsorship of the Territory Youth Parliament, to name but a few. It is not an exclusive list. This youth policy builds on those programs and provides far greater impetus for an enhanced role and numerous opportunities for young people.

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I turn now to a discussion of the initiatives in the policy. My government is committed to celebrating the achievements and contributions that young people make to our Territory. We will stage a Youth Festival next year as a celebration of Territory youth. The festival will incorporate a Youth Week and the Youth Arts Festival. Young people will be involved in all aspects of the planning of the festival. The final program for the festival will draw not only on input from young Territorians, but also on a report commissioned by the Northern Territory government. This report, undertaken for the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, will be considered in developing the youth festival program. The festival will celebrate the cultural, ethnic and social diversity of young Territorians, and will include activities that meet the needs and interests of each of these groups. We will ensure that events are staged throughout the Territory, and we will provide opportunities for the mixing and sharing of youth culture. I look forward to the input of 12- to 25-year-olds from all parts of the Territory in achieving a youth festival unsurpassed in the rest of the nation. Some of the proposed activities are sporting carnivals, concerts, a film festival, a careers exhibition, and a Tournament of the Minds.

The Territory government will also continue to celebrate the achievements of young Territorians through schemes such as the Young Territorian of the Year, the Northern Territory Literary Awards, the Youth Business Awards and the Northern Territory Sports Awards. The encouragement and participation of young people in decision-making is an essential ingredient in this Youth Policy. It is critical that young Territorians are major contributors to all government programs and policies that impact on them. To that end, a Round Table of Young People will be established. I am particularly proud of this initiative as it is tangible evidence that this government is serious about consulting young Territorians on their needs, hopes, aspirations and

frustrations. The round table will be comprised of 12 young Territorians aged between

12 and 25. These young people will be selected to represent the geographic, cultural and ethnic diversity of the Territory. I am so committed to this forum for youth that I propose to meet with the round table on a quarterly basis. There will be active encouragement of the young people of the round table to become involved in decision-making, and I will ensure that members of the table play a significant part in the development and implementation of programs and policies for young people. The round table will also be a forum that young people from all walks of life, in all parts of the Territory, can approach with suggestions on improvement of policies, programs and services, and with ideas for new initiatives.

It is imperative that the government listen carefully to the messages that young Territorians are giving in relation to all facets of government policy and service delivery. I will ensure that my government provides a coordinated response to issues affecting young people and, through the establishment of an Inter-agency Committee on Youth Affairs, maintains a whole-of-government approach to youth issues. It is very easy, within the frameworks of government, for policies and programs to become fragmented across a number of agencies. I can say that, in the Territory, there has been and continues to be a concerted effort on the part of government to achieve coordination among various government organisations on numerous issues. The establishment of an Inter-agency Committee on Youth Affairs is an extension of that practice and will enable the government to benefit from the coordinated energies of the relevant agencies. In turn, young Territorians will also gain that benefit.

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Providing positive opportunities is one of the primary obligations that my government and the community both have to young people. This is an underlying theme of the youth policy. It is important that young people are provided with the opportunity to make a successful transition from school to further education or the work force through schemes such as career counselling, work experience and job placement for school leavers. To that end, the Territory government will increase the number of scholarships offered for young people to attend university or undertake vocational education training. In addition, we will increase the amount of money available through these scholarships to meet the ever-increasing expenses of simply being a student. The government will ensure that there are adequate opportunities for young people to gain employment in the public sector. There will be an increase in the number of positions for Year 12 school leavers, and an increase in the number of graduate trainees. We will also increase substantially the opportunities for young people who are studying at tertiary level to undertake vacation employment. There will be enhanced awareness of the availability of defence forces programs. In addition, considerable encouragement will be given to young people to participate in, for example, school-based cadets and defence forces reserves.

I am convinced that, with a bit of assistance, every young person has the imagination and energy to be successful at whatever she or he may choose. With the ever-increasing business opportunities in the Territory, given the huge markets to the north, I consider it imperative that we assist young people to capitalise on these opportunities. In order to achieve this, my government will establish a youth desk within the Department of Asian Relations, Trade and Industry to assist young people who are contemplating establishing their own businesses. We will conduct advisory courses on small business, including the benefits and risks of establishing a business. For those young Territorians who decide to proceed, start-up grants, which will enable the purchase of equipment or provide for capital in the venture, will be available. There will also be an emphasis on the role that private enterprise can play in realising the full potential of Territory youth. We will liaise with industry organisations in the private sector to ensure that they, as well as the government, are meeting their obligations in terms of the employment and training of our young Territorians.

Another initiative enunciated in the policy is the provision of a number of grants to young people to undertake innovative projects that will benefit the broader youth community. These grants will be available also to young Territorians for projects that promote personal development. This will go hand in hand with another initiative, a peer development program. Members will be aware that the influence of peers seems to be exponential to other influencing factors on young people. In order to harness that power in a positive way and in a way that will benefit the community as a whole, the peer development program will become a major part of the package for youth.

Housing for youth in crisis and for homeless youth is an incredibly emotional and heartrending issue. Members will be very familiar with this government's enormous commitment to people in crisis in the community. The vast sums of money that have been and will continue to be expended on services and programs for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence is a fine example of that commitment. Women and men from all cultural and ethnic groups in crisis in our community have availed themselves of the very innovative services that have resulted from the government's Domestic Violence Strategy.

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Returning now to our young people who may be in crisis situations, I am pleased to announce that funding to the non-government sector for the provision of crisis housing for youth will not be depleted in any way. Indeed, the Minister for Housing will be reporting to Cabinet within 6 months on whether there should be more innovative and creative ways, within the bounds of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, to apply those funds. In addition, he will consider any other

avenues that may be open to the Territory government to add to the pool of funds. It has been drawn to my attention that there exists a difficulty with some women's organisations that provide crisis accommodation for women. The difficulty is that male children of 14 years and over of women seeking shelter are unable to remain in those shelters with their mothers. I have requested the Minister for Housing to undertake a feasibility study of the establishment of a family crisis shelter to try to overcome this difficulty.

The Territory government will ensure that young people are able to avail themselves of appropriate housing and will continue to provide public housing as well as interest-free loans for bonds and rent subsidy assistance for people to rent privately. Opportunities will continue and will be enhanced to allow young people to purchase their own homes through the HomeNorth scheme.

For some time now, the Northern Territory government has committed considerable resources to sports organisations and individuals in the community. That investment, particularly in young people, is paying off. I have mentioned already our Territory Olympic and Paralympic medallists and participants. I repeat that their achievements were remarkable. These athletes are great role models for all young Territorians interested in sport. Sport is an integral component of the lifestyle of all Territorians. Young sportspeople will be given the opportunity to compete at an elite level, through the Northern Territory Institute of Sport and programs such as the Talented Aboriginal Sports Program. Young Women in Sport will be encouraged further, through the highly successful Women in Sport and Recreation (WISAR) program. Sport will continue to be a major vehicle for promoting and encouraging young Territorians.

As a parent of very young children, I am conscious that very quickly, in fact too quickly, they become youth. I am concerned about the availability of appropriate entertainment for young people in the Territory. Young Territorians, particularly those under 18, require venues that should not only provide quality entertainment but should also avoid the pressures of drugs or alcohol. My government will implement a program that will provide grants to promoters and venue owners or hirers to present quality live entertainment for young people, but at venues that are free from drugs and alcohol. Priorities for such grants will be given to young entrepreneurs who meet the conditions of the grant. This is an important initiative of the Territory government.

The Youth Policy recognises the Office of Youth Affairs as playing a major role in providing information to young people and the youth sector. A collection of publications and material on matters pertaining to young people will be established in the office. In addition, the office will investigate the use of technology, such as the Internet, for disseminating information. The office will produce a number of publications that identify and make young people aware of the government as well as the publication of Northern Territory and Commonwealth funding sources for

youth activities.

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Time does not permit me to provide detail on every single initiative enumerated in the policy I have tabled today, nor does it permit me to recall proudly the achievements of this government for the 12- to 25-year-olds in our community. Enormous difficulties and huge challenges face our youth, but may I say that Territory youth is of such a calibre that it will overcome the difficulties and face the challenges with far greater energy, enthusiasm and creativity than any other group of young people in our nation. However, like all of us in the community, young people should not be expected to do it all by themselves. Both the government and the private sector have a responsibility, in partnership with young people, to ensure absolutely that young Territorians are able to maximise their potential. Young people are to be encouraged to participate at all levels in our society. They are to be encouraged to come forward with creative and innovative ideas, and are to be encouraged to achieve excellence in whichever field of endeavour they may choose to pursue. My government's commitment to young people is illustrated clearly by the Youth Policy I have tabled today. All our young Territorians are a fine example to the rest of the nation. They are an integral part of our diverse community. They are the cornerstone for the future of this paradise that we call the Northern Territory. We should celebrate their achievements, however large or small, and we must provide the means by which they continue to contribute to this remarkable place that we all call home.

Mr Speaker, I move that the Assembly take note of the statement.

Mr BAILEY (Wanguri): Mr Speaker, in relation to the statement and the policy tabled by the Chief Minister, Territory Labor intends to provide a cautious response for 2 reasons. The first is that this detailed document was received in the Leader of the Opposition's office only very late last night. It was well after the Assembly rose and it was not seen by myself, the shadow minister for youth and young families, until this morning. Therefore, I have not been able to give it the time it deserves if I am to provide a full and detailed response. Suffice it to say that we shall certainly be doing so in due course. Secondly, we intend to take this policy document to Territory youth groups for their assessment of it. We want to hear what the people who are affected by this policy have to say about it, and not simply respond ourselves. Therefore, I stress that our response will be cautious.

I believe the only reason this document has been tabled today is because, over recent months, the opposition has been hounding the government about its policy. Members may recall that, in a blaze of glory 3 years ago, the Country Liberal Party administration announced a wide-ranging consultation process with Territory youth. At the conclusion of that round of consultation, the Country Liberal Party

administration declared it would present a youth policy. We waited and waited. People who were youths when they were involved in the consultation process moved out of that age bracket. Youth workers came and went. However, many of them are still around. They have asked continually what has become of the youth policy. Finally, 3 years later, we have the Youth Policy. We are aware that at least one version of this was rejected earlier by Cabinet. That policy simply disappeared. In response to discussions I had with youth groups, I asked this administration to explain where the policy had gone. I point out that, this year, the opposition created a portfolio of youth and young families. It seems strange that the government has found a new interest in youth. We called for the policy. I had even to suggest that I would give a reward for the policy. Lo and behold, we have the policy today.

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Mr Stone: May I have the reward? Will you pay me the reward?

Mr BAILEY: I am sure that this is the underlying reason for it. The Chief Minister wants now to claim that reward because he has finally found it.

Mr Reed: I would be more than a little worried with you mixing with our youth.

Mrs Hickey: What is that supposed to mean? Explain yourself.

Mr BAILEY: We have seen the member for Katherine's obsessive compulsive behaviour in this parliament over recent weeks and months. I suggest that it is he who needs to seek some professional advice.

Mr Stone: You are such a well-balanced person yourself.

Mr BAILEY: If he carries on this way, he will find he has a restraining order against him.

Mr Finch: That seems to be a threat.

Mr Reed: I don't think he fancies you, John. I can assure you of that.

Mr BAILEY: It is not me he fancies, but it is pretty obvious to everyone else where his obsession is heading.

I suppose we should be pleased that the Country Liberal Party administration does take some notice of us and responds when we start jumping up and down about a few issues. It is a pity it does not take more notice in some other areas. What is not explained in this document is the consultation process that the administration has followed since the 1993 round of consultations. There is a brief mention in the Chief

Minister's statement of `a 4-year consultation process with youth and youth groups'. From talking with people, I have not been able to find any evidence that, since that initial consultation, anything at all has happened until recently. I am keen to know what the nature and level of that consultation has been in the 3 years since 1993. I suspect it has been very poor. Certainly, numerous youth groups I have spoken with were singularly unaware of further consultation.

Having said that, I do not wish to dwell on the negatives of the way the Chief Minister runs his government and creates policy. We will be assessing the policy quite closely. In particular, we will be examining whether it deals with a number of critical issues sufficiently, creatively and effectively. Those issues include employment and unemployment, housing, education ...

Mr Reed: Well, why don't you get on with it? You have had it since last night.

Mr BAILEY: About midnight last night.

Housing, education, health issues, abuse and violence ...

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Mr Stone: 8.30 pm.

Mr BAILEY: After the House had risen.

A member interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BAILEY: After I had left to attend functions.

As I was saying, the issues include abuse and violence, law and justice, income support, sport, recreation and culture, networking coordination and continuing consultation. We will be examining closely whether this policy provides real initiatives, with an implementation plan and some real dollars attached. Further, we will be examining whether it is the intention of this government to measure itself against its promises and report regularly on the progress of the policy. In recent days, members of the opposition have asked this government to accept some responsibility for reporting back, and we were talking particularly about the legislation relating to mandatory imprisonment. The government's refusal to take on that type of reporting to parliament does not augur well for this policy.

Mr Stone: It is all in the annual report of the police department.

Mr BAILEY: The information that we asked for is not in that annual report. It is not in the annual report for Correctional Services. It is not in the Auditor-General's report. We were asking for costs of imprisonment, increase in numbers and changing crime rates. That information is not there and I suggest the minister with responsibility for Police, Fire and Emergency Services should read his own report to ensure that he knows what is there. He has said in the past that opposition members should read annual reports if they want to know how much ministers spend on overseas travel. The detail of the costs of those trips is not in the annual reports. Maybe the Chief Minister should obtain a little advice before he comes in here telling untruths.

Mr POOLE: A point of order, Mr Speaker! The member should not be implying that the Chief Minister ...

Mr Bailey: This is a youthless interruption, Eric!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr BAILEY: These are the issues that we will be examining. There can be no doubt that the years from 12 to 25 are critical in any person's development. Experiences during that time remain to influence people for the remainder of their life. There can be no doubt that the Territory is extremely fortunate to have so many young people who are role models for everyone in our society. I agree wholeheartedly with the Chief Minister when he says that we should not talk about youth only in terms of future leaders and the contribution they will make in the future. We should look closely and proudly at the contribution they are making today. We must look closely also at the issues that are of concern to them today and see where the government can assist by providing the right policies and the right support for youth.

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We all know young people whom we admire. The Chief Minister listed some of those young people. Every time I visit a school or a community group where there are young people, I am very impressed by and proud of their achievements. Far too often, however, this government has focused on the negative aspects of young people. For example, the Attorney-General has said that some young people are hardened criminals by the time they are 15. Last week, we debated mandatory sentencing, designed to throw young people into jail on the second finding of guilt, no matter what the circumstances behind those offences and no matter what other avenues were available to turn the young person into a productive member of society. Young people will be thrown into prison on their second offence if they are under 17. As defined in this document, young people are aged 12 to ...

Mr Reed: After having broken into and trashed someone's house!

Mr BAILEY: When we raised concern over this mandatory imprisonment, the minister asked what happens if a youth breaks into and trashes someone's house. What happens if your car is stolen and totally written off? I agree with him. People who do that type of thing should be dealt with severely, taking into account all the circumstances, which are very variable. However, take what occurred with high school students on their muck-up day. It was reported in the NT News. My understanding of the new law is that, if those Year 12 students were 17 years old and were caught, they would go to jail for 14 days for that activity. If one of them had a previous conviction, it would be 90 days and, with 2 previous convictions, the offender could go to jail for a year for that type of activity.

The minister used one extreme example of what people can be sent to jail for and asked if we wanted those sorts of people running loose. We do not want that. We believe, however, that account must be taken of the seriousness of the crime, the possibility of rehabilitation etc. With the new law, 3 people who committed the same crime could go to jail for different periods, depending on whether they had offended previously. For quite minor crimes, 17- or 18-year-olds could go to jail for 12 months. That is what this law does. When the Chief Minister presents his youth policy without commenting on that, without saying what advice he sought from young people in a youth advisory group, it is appalling. I suspect that one of the first issues his youth advisory group might talk about is the new compulsory sentencing and how they feel about it.

Perhaps it is time that this administration started to acknowledge the positive side of youth issues instead of constantly highlighting negative issues. Having said that, I am unimpressed with the focus of its negatives. Crime and law and order seem to be about the limit of it. As important as that issue is, it has been a long time since we have heard an expression of concern from this government about youth unemployment, youth suicide, youth housing and other issues. In fact, one of the most disgraceful statistics that this government wears is the retention rates of youth in our schools. We have the lowest retention rate in the country in our high schools and it is becoming worse, not better. I would like the Minister for Education and Training to tell me how the heck he thinks that young Territorians will get a good start in their working lives if they continue to leave school early in such large numbers? I would like to know also what he intends to do about it? We seem never to hear any solutions from the member for Leanyer.

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Keeping the young people at school longer is made somewhat academic too if we cannot ensure they are attending regularly. How many years has it been since we have heard anything from this government on the matter of truancy? Not only is truancy deeply concerning because of the problems it creates for the community in the immediate sense - antisocial behaviour and crime - but also from the point of

view of the effects it has on young people later in their lives. The issues of education retention rates and truancy are at the core of youth unemployment. Youth unemployment in the Territory is horrendous. High levels of youth unemployment are spread throughout the length and breadth of the Territory. Youth on remote communities and youth in our regional centres suffer from this unemployment. What is not apparent is what this government intends to do about it. I hope to discover some solutions buried in this policy. Those solutions will need to go to the issue of sustainable job creation for youth in our community.

Another major issue for youth is housing. There are concerns from Territory youth on every sector of housing from private rental through to crisis accommodation. The private rental market in the Territory is extremely difficult for youth, with the cost being extremely high. The waiting list for young people seeking 1-bedroom accommodation with the Housing Commission in Darwin is 96 months. In other words, when you have your 10th birthday, you should put your name on the Housing Commission list so you can obtain a 1-bedroom unit when you are 18. If you wait until you are about to leave school or home at 18, you will be 26 before you obtain a 1-bedroom unit. That is the situation in Darwin. Young Territorian couples, particularly those who begin a family at a young age, pay up to \$250 a week in rent. That means that both have to work to pay for their accommodation. Now that an increase is planned in child-care fees, that option is beginning to dry up for them. How will they ever save enough for a deposit for a home when they are paying \$250 a week in rent? It is virtually impossible for many of them to save anything. In many ways, we are condemning our young people to a life in rental accommodation for many years if they wish to remain in the Territory. Unfortunately, those are the fortunate ones.

If you require crisis accommodation, you can forget it if you live in Palmerston, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy or Katherine because there is none. If you live in Alice Springs or Darwin, your options for crisis accommodation are extremely limited and will become further limited when Aranda House in Alice Springs is closed down. It is an unfortunate fact of life that young people from 12 years up, do have to find crisis accommodation at times. That situation cannot be blithely ignored by saying that everyone should stay at home within the family unit. For some people, that is impossible because some families are suffering extreme breakdown. Where do you go if you are 14 years old and in need of crisis accommodation in Katherine?

Mr Finch: The best solution often is for them to go back home.

Mr BAILEY: The member for Leanyer says that often the best solution is for them to go back home. There is no denying that.

Mr Finch: It is the preferred option.

Mr BAILEY: It is the preferred option in many cases.

Mr Finch interjecting.

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Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BAILEY: However, what about the case where it is not the preferred option? What if physical, sexual or psychological abuse is involved, and it is not appropriate? Where do they go? There is nothing.

Mr Finch: That is not true.

Mr BAILEY: I am happy for you to tell me. In Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Tennant Creek, where do they go? You know all the answers.

Mr Finch: To foster homes, through the system.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BAILEY: These young people live on the streets or in someone else's house for a few nights. They move from one house to another or they live in the Katherine equivalent of the long grass. That is a disgraceful situation. Where is the youth housing policy? Is it contained in here? No. Instead, it charges the minister with some responsibility to get the policy together next year.

I was fascinated when I reached that point. I really wondered what the Chief Minister was on about when he said he was pleased to announce that funding would not be cut. Here we go, word for word: 'I am very pleased to announce that funding to the non-government sector for the provision of crisis housing for youth will not in any way be depleted'. His great promise is not to cut youth crisis housing funding. Wow! He sees that as one of the key aspects of his youth policy. I am sure all the people who work with youth, who have an interest in the youth housing crisis, will be thrilled to know that the minister will not cut funding in that regard. Was he implying that he was going to cut it or that others wanted to cut it and he managed to keep it at the same level? I suspect that may be the truth of the matter.

As I have said previously in this Chamber, for the last 10 or 15 years, there have been attempts to extract a decent youth crisis housing policy from this government. I was involved directly at Palmerston in the mid-1980s when everyone was saying that something had to be done about youth housing and that systems were needed urgently to provide those in crisis with access to accommodation. We must set up systems to ensure that those in crisis situations have somewhere to go. For those

with some income, systems of joint sharing, involving the Housing Commission and private renters, could have been set up. However, all the Chief Minister says is that he is happy to announce that the government will not cut the funding. All I can say is that he is easily pleased. It is not good enough, particularly when we know that, for many years, housing ministers have been trying to have a policy prepared.

Perhaps the Chief Minister may like to tell us whether any of the groups in the youth networks have expressed strong support for the draft youth housing policy with which they have been presented. I bet he would be scratching to find a single group that believes that a good document has been presented to them. Some of them have said that they wish to resign from the consultative committee because they do not want their names attached to the

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document written to date. That is how much they like it. Presented with a draft document into which they supposedly have had input, rather than welcoming it or perhaps wanting to modify it slightly, they want their names removed. They want nothing to do with it. That is the level of acceptance that the government is obtaining from the youth sector. People do not want to stake their reputation on the documents that this Country Liberal Party administration has put together on youth housing. No wonder the Chief Minister flick-passed the youth housing issue in this paper on to his housing minister! He wants only the popular bits. He knows it is an enormous problem to which many people in our community are agitating for answers. No youth policy that does not effectively address housing is a full youth policy.

Youth health issues are characterised by a sense of recklessness in many ways. It is about risk taking. Unfortunately, many risk taking activities can result in severe problems. Our health services need to be able to respond to those issues. Our community organisations need to be able to address issues of sexuality, alcohol usage, drug usage, and other lifestyle matters. Like many others across the country, this government has refused consistently to set measurable targets for the reduction of lifestyle illnesses. It does not change its approach in this policy document today. I believe that is unfortunate. Nor does the policy document of this administration deal with mental health as it relates to youth. Youth suicide is a real problem in this nation and in the Northern Territory. Dealing with the issue must certainly be an important part of our youth health response. The same applies to youth mental health problems generally. Specific youth counselling services virtually do not exist in the Territory. Problems exist with the legal issues of people under 18 receiving counselling. Frequently, they cannot access such services without parental consent. In many cases, that would be fine but, in some cases, obtaining that parental consent is difficult. The Attorney-General needs to look at these matters. Ongoing funding is required for a range of youth-focused health projects that are being run currently as joint pilot projects. The evaluation of these programs must be thorough.

Once evaluated as being successful, they require ongoing commitment from this government.

I am very happy to praise the efforts of the government in sport and recreation. We are committed to continuing high levels of support for them, and to improvements generally where these can be made. We would like to see much more done in the development of the rich talent in our rural and remote areas and a targeting of young people for skills development in those areas. We are generally very happy with the strategies announced in this policy statement and in other statements made by the relevant minister this year.

The same can be said of the announcement of a youth festival. It is a fine idea, and one that we will support 100%. The same can be said for the Chief Minister's proposal for the development of appropriate entertainment. He is correct in saying there is a need to look at what is available for people under 18. This means looking at venues as well as activities. More often than not, the real problem is with the venues. Because of the alcohol focus of many leisure venues, such as nightclubs, it is very difficult for people aged 12 to 18 to participate without breaking the law. The Chief Minister has our support for his efforts in this regard.

I cannot say that his outrageous throttling of the Darwin Music Development Centre has been a great beacon for his efforts to date. We hope that, in developing these leisure areas, he will take into account the need to develop and foster youth talents around these events.

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Young musicians generally do not all aspire to become members of the Darwin Symphony Orchestra, proud though we may be of those who do. Many of them want to be in rebellious rock bands, singing lyrics that are almost impossible to understand with some incredibly heavy guitar and drum work. Good on them! I think it is great. These young people have very limited opportunities to do that in Darwin, and virtually no opportunity to develop their skills outside of Darwin. On these issues, this policy paper has our full support. We will be talking to young people about the types of activities and adventures they will want to take on under these proposals, and we will support them where possible in those efforts.

Let me turn to the matter of networking. Again, Territory Labor welcomes the policy paper dealing with these issues, though perhaps we have some differences on how to achieve the required outcomes. The development of an Office of Youth Affairs is a welcome approach. This office will have a big task on its hands, providing a whole-of-government approach to youth issues and getting across the issues that other departments deal with in terms of youth matters. I am pleased that it is receiving the backing of an across-departments coordinating body in this regard. I agree with the

Chief Minister that, all too often, the approach is fragmented and contradictory. Bringing together the departments that have responsibility for various areas of policy that affect youth is a good step in coordination, although I must say I am a little surprised ...

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Ms MARTIN (Fannie Bay): Mr Speaker, I move that the honourable member be granted an extension of time.

Motion agreed to.

Mr BAILEY: Mr Speaker, I thank members.

I agree with the Chief Minister that, all too often, the approach is fragmented and contradictory. Bringing together the departments that have responsibility for different areas of policy that affect youth is a good step in coordination, although I must say that I am a little surprised that it is not happening already. The Office of Youth Affairs will need to be staffed adequately and appropriately resourced if it is to do this job properly. I have yet to see evidence from the Chief Minister of his plans in that regard, and they are not indicated in the paper tabled today.

The Round Table of Young People is a good idea, but I will reserve my judgment on it. I want to see it in action. I do not criticise it. I believe it is vital that youth have strong input to youth policy and programs, and I will watch it with interest. Similar coordination needs to be provided to link the non-government sector and the government in relation to youth issues. This does not need to be more than an afterthought and adjunct to the government's inter-agency committee. The non-government sector plays a very significant role in the provision of services to youth. Therefore, I would like to know in what way it will be incorporated into this program of coordination, and how its views will be filtered into the process.

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In conclusion, I congratulate the Chief Minister on finally tabling and outlining in the Assembly the government's youth policy. As I mentioned earlier, we have had very little time in which to study and evaluate it. However, from my brief reading of it, it appears the one area in which I can make positive comment is that of youth development and the expansion of their potential. There are a significant number of positive outcomes that will result from the youth policy. However, I am disappointed that there is very little in the policy relating to young people who are experiencing difficult times - those who find that they do not fit into the mainstream of society, those in remote areas, those on the streets, those experiencing mental or health problems, those abusing drugs etc. I believe these young people have been

neglected in the Chief Minister's statement. From discussions I have had with people in the youth affairs area - youth workers in non-government and government sectors - I believe that will be the main criticism of the document. I think the government will need to respond to that. I believe the Chief Minister will receive considerable criticism from the youth sector in relation to recent initiatives such as the mandatory imprisonment legislation.

I commend the Chief Minister for the statement to the extent that I have indicated. It goes part of the way to outlining what should be done for youth in the Northern Territory.

Mrs BRAHAM (Braitling): Mr Speaker, I commend the Chief Minister on his statement on the Youth Policy. I particularly like the across-government approach in the policy. It is very important to have a coordinated approach. When you have been involved with young people all your life, it is very hard ever to grow old. Young people have a great deal of vigour and provide older people with incentive. It is interesting to see them grow up from their early years, through their school years to become teenagers. We hope they survive those years successfully. As young adults, they walk in your door as a constituent. I am pleased that I have had continual involvement with the youth of Alice Springs. I believe they can offer so much to our society and we sometimes underestimate their wealth of talent. It is too easy to dwell on the minority who do not do as well as we would hope and forget to acknowledge the achievements of the majority who become solid, contributing citizens.

There are a couple of areas in the policy document that I would like to comment on. The first is that, through the Office of Youth Affairs and Territory Health Services, there is to be a program that will provide drug and alcohol free entertainment venues for young people throughout the Northern Territory. In Alice Springs, the town council has a youth committee of which Fran Erlich is the chairperson. It has put in place already some initiatives along these lines. The Xtreme Nightclub's activities have been extremely successful over the last 12 months. They are held at nightclub venues that are usually out of bounds to 15- to 18-year-olds. They are held without any grog or any signs of grog. There are various disco bands and the activities are supervised by volunteers - the young people themselves and people from DASA, Tangentyere Council, YMCA, the Gap Centre etc. They prove that these activities can work and that people can have a good time without drugs, without alcohol and without smoking. I hope the Office of Youth Affairs talks to the people who organise the Xtreme Nightclub events to gain an idea of how successful they are. I am sure it will be most impressed.

The Northern Territory Board of Studies and the Department of Education are to assist in the development of young people by organising a careers expo each year. This year, Alice Springs Town Council organised a careers expo for young people on Anzac Hill Oval. It

invited a number of businesses, government departments and schools to mount displays whereby young people could obtain information about career opportunities. The Department of Sport and Recreation, Tangentyere Council and the Power and Water Authority were involved. The most successful and popular stall was run by McDonald's which is to open an outlet in Alice Springs. It was on a recruiting drive. Young people from all the high schools registered with this stall. The young people came to the expo to see what it offered and to talk to people. St Philip's had a stall on which I participated. We brought in a number of people to talk to students on matters in which they were interested. There was a signwriter, a painter, a lawyer, a politician etc. If students were interested in that career, they could obtain information about it. It was a highly successful day. Career expos do work, particularly if they are organised in consultation with young people. This expo was organised in consultation with the youth committee.

The Department of Education is to develop support programs for Aboriginal students in urban secondary schools, emphasising school to further study and school to work options and encouraging Aboriginal students to complete formal secondary education and to consider tertiary education through the Aboriginal Tertiary Aspirations Program. One of my major concerns as a former educator has been seeing young Aboriginal people succeed so very well at primary level and junior secondary level but, when they reach senior secondary level, they drop out. They drop out for all manner of reasons - peer pressure, lack of family support, loss of self-esteem etc. We can always use that as an excuse - they are immature, they cannot organise themselves, they start drinking, they start experimenting with drugs etc. It has distressed me to see some students, whom I know have tremendous talent, go down that path.

A parent approached me not long ago. She has 2 exceptional daughters who had succeeded well in primary and junior secondary school. However, in senior secondary school, when it was so important for them to become a credit to their parents and to Aboriginal people, and a model for other Aboriginal students, they bombed out. If the Department of Education is really serious about what it is saying in this policy, it will need to set in place special provision for these senior secondary Aboriginal students. Some people have said that they are old enough to get their own act together. They should be able to organise themselves. Why should we make a special effort for them? I believe we have a responsibility to help them through this very delicate stage. It is the time in their lives when they are most at risk - from 15 to 17 years of age. They may not have the family support they need, checking on their activities, their work, their attendance etc. Perhaps there is pressure from their peers not to do the right thing. There needs to be a support program to assist them to survive those later years.

Why do we need to have these special structures? Why do we need to put special programs in place for them? I believe we owe them something. If they have succeeded so well in primary school and junior secondary school, they should be assisted through the last 2 years and on to tertiary study. I believe they need the right person to talk to at that level. They should have opportunities to talk to people whom they feel they can trust and confide in. There must be someone who takes that personal interest in them. I am not saying that that applies only to Aboriginal students. Obviously, it applies very much to many of our mainstream children. However, all too often, I have seen good Aboriginal students bomb out. I hope the Department of Education will follow up on what it has stated here. An excellent example of how it can be done can be seen at Alice Springs High School. Paul Fitzsimons, a

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teacher there, has an excellent program for students in Years 9, 10, 11 and 12. The students whom he is catering for may not always be the most academic, but he is successfully assisting Aboriginal students right through secondary school. I trust that program will continue. I would like to see some of the young students, whom I knew as top achievers in primary school, continue to be top achievers in secondary and tertiary education. Our youth will be the leaders of tomorrow. Our youth will be the people who will be making decisions for us when we are old.

Mr Bailey: Avenge yourself. Live long enough to be a burden on your children!

Mrs BRAHAM: I do not think I will be a burden on my children but, if I am, I am sure they will bear it happily because that is the kind of children they are.

We need to ensure that we give these young people every opportunity. We need also to recognise the goodness in the community. I hope this policy will give opportunities for those promising young adolescents and youth to put their hands up, to promote their ideas and really to contribute well in whatever way they can. I commend this policy and I will be very interested to see how it is advanced.

Mr TOYNE (Stuart): Mr Speaker, whenever I see a proposal on public policy, probably my first duty as the representative of my electorate is to try to picture my constituents against the policy to see if it actually matches what I understand to be their lives and their needs. Having had a quick look through this document, I can say that it does match some of my constituents. I can see its response to the situation of some of the families whose homes I have come across while doorknocking in Dixon Road and Arunga Street. These are people who have stable homes with young people attending school. They are people who are well-connected in businesses around Alice Springs and who know how to look after themselves in many ways.

They know where the opportunities are and they pick up on those opportunities.

I will now go through the categories of the document very quickly. Youth forums: I can imagine any number of young people in Dixon Road who could sit as one of those 12 people on the youth forum or represent central Australia in the Youth Parliament. I can see the opportunities being offered in the business sector, the defence forces and government agencies. This part of my constituency does regularly pick up those kinds of jobs. With this additional assistance, it will be easier for them to do that. Curriculum changes at school or relevant curriculum: they are at school and they will obtain many benefits if the curriculum is made more relevant and more powerful, particularly through its connection to vocation. They are all almost motherhood statements of school programs. They are supposed to do those things. University places: I am sure we will see a continuation of students from that part of Alice Springs being represented at NTU and universities interstate. Artists: we have a very strong artistic community in Alice Springs, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. My own daughter is training in fine arts. I certainly hope she may be able to take advantage of those new initiatives along with other people. Sport: I think Alice Springs and other urban centres are well served by sporting clubs and I guess have elite levels of sport and additional support for people trying to enter sport. I have no objections to that for groups who are able to take advantage of it. Housing: this group that I am talking about live in very comfortable houses for the most part, although scattered among those households are people who are struggling. The sort of youth

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that I am talking about at the moment are generally in comfortable and reasonably settled homes. In terms of information technology, I believe their schools provide that. In many cases, there are private computers in homes, and others have access to information and skilling in that area through their parents' business involvement. The police are generally a welcome sight to this group of people. They help to maintain law and order in the neighbourhood, and they are personally liked by most people in the area. In fact, 9 police personnel live in Dixon Road. Information on youth programs is readily available.

However, that is not the full extent of my constituency. There are other groups of youth that I cannot see as fitting readily into the policy in this document. The overall retention rate in schools in the Northern Territory was slightly over 52% last year and about 54% the year before. What happens to the young people who drop out of school? I am very familiar with this group in Alice Springs because my kids hang around both with kids who are still in school and with many who are not. Some of them obtain a job or go on to further training, and they will probably be fine. However, a great many of them adopt what I would call an unemployed lifestyle where life is filled with activities other than work or school. Typically, it involves a

cycle of social events such as parties where binge drinking and marijuana use may be quite common. They may spend their day trying to get into clubs and pubs as early as possible, playing pool or riding BMX bikes. These kids do not all come from poor homes. They come from a mixture of backgrounds; some are from very rich homes. They have one thing in common - they have given up regular involvement in school, and they have not taken up regular involvement with employment. They have invented a lifestyle outside those areas. I have concerns because that entire group is constantly hovering on the edge of drug use of a more serious nature than marijuana.. There are no avenues for those kids to be influenced by the community or indeed by their own families in many cases because they have set up accommodation arrangements. One person, who is perhaps from a more affluent background or who has a job and has access to a flat, collects a whole range of other teenagers around him who have dropped out of school and want to spend time away from their family homes. That is the picture that I see in Alice Springs, alongside the families who present a more settled and, if you like, conventional picture - the sort of picture that I suspect this document is mainly talking about.

There are some serious potential problems with those kids. What will they do with their lives? If they reach 20 or 30 years of age with no work experience they can take into the marketplace to obtain a job, and no skills or access to gaining skills, and their peer group is constantly setting up alternative lifestyles around them, I do not know where it will lead them. It is a new phenomenon in Australia. We have been used to high employment levels in the country, and we have not had this long-term youth unemployment. It is not simply a case of jobs not being readily available for these kids. It is also a case of their having this lifestyle, which they are setting up at that age, and it taking them away from any serious consideration of work.

I turn now to the other part of my constituency - the bush. I have even more problems with trying to see Aboriginal youth in this policy statement. I would issue a challenge to take any teenager from a place like Bonya or Nyirripi, put them on that forum and let us see how the forum draws meaningful participation from that member. While these young people can be very strong in parochial surroundings, to take them into any of the representational structures that are proposed in the document would be simply to disempower the process entirely. I do

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not think a teenager from Bonya or Nyirripi would find anything familiar or welcoming about a youth forum or a youth parliament for that matter. However, I did have a wonderful time in here with about 50 kids from Yuendumu School at the last sittings. They sat around this Chamber and that was one of the nicest things I have done since I entered parliament. However, we were not seriously debating issues of youth.

There has to be a degree of cynicism about yet another round of trying to offer

business opportunities and opportunities to gain employment in government agencies to the sort of young people whom I am now talking about. Remote Aboriginal kids have had a pretty appalling success rate in obtaining jobs in any of those sectors. Where are the initiatives that are tailored to the challenges that their employment problems present? It is not impossible to employ remote Aboriginal teenagers. Over the years, I have developed many arrangements where meaningful employment has been created for individual kids in our communities. However, it is not done through a formal, urban-based process. I cannot see any of the bush in this statement. There is no hint of going out and looking at the environment - the family environment, the cultural environment - and determining how something could be conjured up within that environment to give those kids a realistic chance of obtaining employment.

Curriculum changes are mentioned, but what effect will they have when those kids are not at school? Essentially, what is required is not a curriculum change or the finetuning of an existing school program. In many cases, there is a need to start again. At Yuendumu, on several occasions, we have done exactly that. If you cannot get kids to school, if they have given up on the conventional schooling model, you have to try something else if you still want to interact with them. There are many practical, field-based initiatives that can do exactly that. We ran a program based on the cattle station at Yuendumu. We moved the traditional training in stock work that Aboriginal people have had available for many years - for several generations in some families - into a renewed form that had formal educational components built in. It was not just a ringer teaching them how to yard cattle and do the practical work of the cattle station. There was some formal work attached to it. We found that worked very well. At a cursory glance, I cannot see that sort of thinking in this document. I am not saying I have read it in detail.

What about Aboriginal artists? The prominent position of Aboriginal art is well known, but no formal process is suggested here to encourage the artists. It needs to be a different process. It is not a case of offering scholarships. It is a case of supporting art production in other ways in a community, and depending on family teaching and environment to bring the young people into it. That happens very well in 'strong art' production. At several communities where I have been involved in having art cooperatives established, inevitably, if you get a group of senior women or senior men painting commercially, they bring their families into it as a matter of course. It is part of the teaching process from one generation to the other. The way to support young Aboriginal artists is to support art production in general, and to ensure that that is kept strong so that the youth are involved in it.

Turning to housing, the young people in my constituency are in 1 of 2 situations if they have left school. They may choose to stay in their communities in which case a raft of problems may eventuate there, one of which is with housing. Some communities do provide housing for unmarried men and women, along with widows.

However, in many cases the young blokes will take off. They will go to Alice Springs or Tennant Creek or Katherine and,

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together with many adults, they will go into the riverbed or into pretty tacky accommodation around town. They fall into the same pattern of binge drinking and other self-destructive behaviour that the adults are following. Destructive behaviour is perpetuated generationally and it grows worse because substance abuse, particularly petrol sniffing which predates the use of alcohol and other drugs, begins earlier and earlier. Five or 10 years ago, young people were pretty stable until early adulthood. Today, we see children of 8 to 10 becoming involved with petrol sniffing. The only reason they do not graduate to alcohol before their late teens is that it is hard for them to get a piece of the action with the grog runs that occur.

Information technology in the bush means usually only a few computers in the school. I am not knocking that. I believe it is great that computers are provided to the schools. However, I ask what they are for. Computer technology may play a major part in the upbringing of our youth but, in the bush, it does not connect to the jobs that most of these youth will take on. It is only in the school. There is no culture outside the school for the use of that technology. Therefore, it is not as big an issue for the bush. Conveying information on youth programs requires a really strong commitment, not only to using language, but also to using Aboriginal role models to get the messages across otherwise it will not have any effect. What we do not need in the bush is new pamphlets in English, telling us about things to which people probably will have very little access.

Little would be needed to build up the benefit of sports to young people in the bush. There is not one male or female, whom I taught or had responsibility for, who would not leap at the chance to join a sporting team for a season's competition, whether it be football, basketball, softball or whatever. Unfortunately, the constraints tend to be the local facilities. Put a couple of basketball rings in the middle of any community and large numbers of kids will begin to play basketball. Someone with a sympathetic ear and a little knowledge of coaching will work that group of kids into a team very quickly if they give them any encouragement at all. Transport is always an impediment to playing teams from other communities although people absolutely love doing that. It seems to me that a strong sponsorship of local competitions and of some coaching facilities in the communities would return multiples of what it would cost to provide them in the bush. Sport is probably one of the key activities that could lead youth away from that destructive lifestyle that is always looming in the immediate future and that could restore some self pride and sense of effort needed to make things better for themselves. We hear a great deal about people taking responsibility for their own future but, for most of these families, it is like standing in front of a tidal wave and saying 'stop' to it. That is the life that is coming at them.

They are surrounded by family members who have ceased to function in their own right and, with the kind of responsibilities that people have under traditional culture and that simply overwhelm people. One of the guys whom I have worked most with over the last 15 years has a drinking problem and he has that drinking problem for very good reasons. He has been driven to drink by the degree of his responsibilities, and the number of tragedies he has seen occurring around him. There are very severe problems and I hope that documents like this are clear about that when framing what is to be done for my constituents.

Mr ADAMSON (Casuarina): Mr Speaker, I would like to add my support for the document tabled today by the Chief Minister. I believe it is very much a living document in that, while it acknowledges what has happened and provides a blueprint for the future, it has also the flexibility to be able to evolve into something more in the future and meet changing

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times and circumstances. I believe that is very important because, in this day and age, the situation changes so rapidly.

The point the Chief Minister made about the young of today already making a contribution is an important one. We hear time and time again that the youth are our future and that they have great potential, and I do not in any way disagree with that. However, there is often a failure to acknowledge the contribution that has been made already by so many of these people who are our future and who have so much to offer. The high profile area of sport certainly comes to mind. In my own electorate, and among my own friends and family, I can think of people in the academic world. I acknowledged recently the great achievement of Alawa Primary School with the Tournament of the Minds and one of the mathematics competitions. These young people were really flying the flag for the Northern Territory in the area of academic achievement. Not only were they holding their own with the rest of Australia but, in many cases, they were beating the rest of Australia. These people have great potential but are also making their mark already in the world. That is great.

I know of people in the scouting movement and other community organisations, some of them barely in their teens, who are already taking a leadership role in society. Some of these come from good backgrounds, but I can think also of a couple of people who have had to struggle. They could quite easily have thrown in the towel and taken it for granted that life had dealt them a poor hand and they would get nowhere. A couple of these people, whom I admire enormously, spring to mind. At this early stage of their lives - one is barely a teenager - they are demonstrating remarkable qualities of leadership. If I had had their background and lack of opportunities, I doubt whether I would have been able to match their achievements.

This is evidenced time and time again by people at NTU. As I acknowledged the other night, they are involved with activities as high profile as the solar cars. I was talking last night with people from some high schools in Darwin about the contributions made by some Year 9 students to the solar cars and not only through the leadership that they displayed during the event but also by their achievements since. They have grown as a result. These people have developed as role models for all Territorians. Role models are important - and I think of high profile sports people such as Nova Peris - because at times some of us feel that we are unable to achieve certain things because we lack the necessary ability or talent. That is when it is important to acknowledge the achievements of these people because they indicate what can be done. As someone said to me recently, it does not matter whether you have been given a thimbleful or a bucketful of talent, provided you contribute the thimbleful or bucketful back. The real tragedy is when you do not make the most of your potential.

I would like to highlight briefly the contributions of a couple of government departments and of very positive Territorians. We have heard of some of those already. When a person is featured in the news, it is unfortunate that, quite often, it is for the wrong reasons. It is because they have run foul of the law or they have done something that has really brought them into a conflict situation. It is unfortunate that society does not acknowledge so readily much of the positive work that is done by many of these people. Some have a high profile and some do not, but we can be proud of the Territory government's policies. I am equally proud of the achievements of the youth of the Northern Territory, not only of people such as Nova Peris and James Swan, but also those whose achievements receive less public attention.

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The Department of Asian Relations, Trade and Industry sponsors several awards that are focused on the achievements of youth in the fields of business and regional development. I believe the activities of the department play an important role in encouraging youth and preparing them for a future in business. The government has identified that as an area where young people can be encouraged in a very positive way. The department is a sponsor of the Northern Territory Young Australian of the Year Regional Development Award. The award recognises the contribution of young people to the development of their regional community, and encourages them to strive to achieve their best. Where possible, the contributions of people outside the major urban areas are highlighted, and I believe that is worth acknowledging. This year's award was won by Rachel Prior of Hamilton Downs Station. Rachel is 12-years-old and has been single-handedly breeding and raising her own stock for 5 years. Rachel has competed regularly in the cattle section at the Alice Springs Show and is an avid contributor to youth groups. As Rachel has said, it is important that the contributions of other finalists in the awards be acknowledged as well. I refer to people like Gabrielle Riley and Kevin Bugg. Gabrielle is a property consultant in

Alice Springs. Her work is directed towards helping families move into a home sooner and her work was recognised with a nomination for the awards. Kevin grew up on Annaburroo Station and has completed studies in tropical beef cattle management. He shared a scholarship from the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association for performance in industry and was named the 1995 senior cattle handler. At the age of 20, Kevin's knowledge is recognised by industry leaders. I was fortunate to attend the Young Australian of the Year Awards recently, and I take this opportunity to congratulate those young people on their achievements.

The Chief Minister's suggestion for a round table is a positive one. I urge all young Territorians to take advantage of it. The problems and challenges that have been highlighted today can be thrashed out around this round table. I urge all young Territorians, if they have even the remotest interest in becoming involved in something like this, to take up the challenge. Whatever the deficiencies that some members of the opposition believe this document may have, this is a great opportunity for the young people of the Territory to have a real and positive say. I cannot urge young Territorians strongly enough to take up this opportunity. In jurisdictions around the world, similar opportunities could be counted almost on the fingers of one hand although there 1 or 2 examples in **Australia**. The opportunity for young Territorians to have their say at the coalface of decision-making and policy-making should not be ignored or diminished. It is an opportunity for young people throughout the Territory, not only those in Darwin and Alice Springs, to have their say. It is the responsibility of all young Territorians to ask themselves whether there is a role for them to play in this, and to take up the challenge.

Multiculturalism and the ethnic communities have made positive contributions to the Territory, and this House acknowledged that recently. The government has a good track record in setting the framework to encourage young Territorians of various backgrounds, including those who may have grown up elsewhere or whose family members may have been born elsewhere. We have prepared a foundation for those people to develop, both in their own culture and in their adopted culture. I believe they have been given a great opportunity to achieve their potential and to use their talents as best they may. While the onus is ultimately on the young people themselves to do this, the government has gone a long way to assist in that area.

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It has been noted that the culture and the art of the Aboriginal people should be encouraged. I urge the Aboriginal people to take their culture to the general community. A perfect example is that Nungalinga College has the occasional open day to enable Aboriginal people to share their culture with the rest of the community. I do not think that happens often enough. I encourage young Territorians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to take part in those activities. They are positive and well-received. I have been to several of those and the people who attended enjoyed

themselves and learnt a great deal. Aboriginal groups and young Aboriginal Territorians should be encouraged to initiate more events of that kind. It is happening, but not enough. This document will certainly assist in that regard. The document has a proposal for a Youth Arts Festival. What a perfect opportunity for Territorians of all backgrounds and of all races to share their culture with others. I urge all young Territorians to participate in such activities. If the opportunity is not available to them immediately, they can aim towards it in the future.

We are all born with gifts and talents of varying degrees. Some of us are born with a thimbleful and others have more. Some are not given the opportunities that others may have, but the responsibility rests with all of us to make the most of what we have. We must do our part as well, and I hope this policy will assist us. The challenge is there for all young Territorians of whatever background to use their talents to work with this document. It is a living document that will evolve into something increasingly positive. It establishes the groundwork and offers educational opportunities for at-risk students. It offers increased sporting and entertainment opportunities for young Territorians in the metropolitan areas and in remote communities. It sets the groundwork for extending support for Commonwealth and Northern Territory programs for homeless youth. It will assist health and suicide prevention programs. The proposals in this document, combined with the existing programs run by the government and community groups, will result in positive outcomes.

Many governments in Australia have allowed youth issues to remain on the backburner for too long. The issues cut across most government departments. At times, it is difficult to link everything together in terms of health, education, housing and sport. In fact, almost every department has some level of responsibility for youth. This document is important because it is the beginning of weaving all those strands into a single fabric. It is a positive document. I support the policy which I believe will evolve as time goes on. I strongly encourage young Territorians to have their say in relation to this document. It sets the framework for support, but it is time for all Territorians, particularly young Territorians, to take up the challenge and work to make this a better place.

Mrs HICKEY (Opposition Leader): Mr Speaker, it is a shame that, when we have finally received this document some years late, the government wants to debate it directly and knock it off the Notice Paper.

Mr Reed: Dear me, you have to work!

Mrs HICKEY: I will pick up the rude interjection from the member for Katherine. It is not simply a matter of reading the document but also of discussing it with our communities and obtaining feedback. The document asks for feedback, and that is fine. However, it would have been advantageous if members had had the opportunity

to consult with the community in the almost 3 months of recess to obtain constructive comment from young people and from

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other interested persons. This is important for us all, whether we are young, old or growing old, and it needs to be considered in a bipartisan fashion.

Young people constitute a large proportion of the population in the Territory and they are important in terms of the resource that they offer to the Northern Territory. We need to exploit that resource - and I use that expression in its nicest sense - and it behoves us all to determine what young people and others think about the policy paper. My preliminary comment - and I have said we will adopt a cautious approach to this - is that employment is the most important aspect for the future of our young people. We want our young people to achieve their maximum potential and become productive members of our community. Whether they obtain high-flying or lowly jobs, whether they do valuable community work or work in the arts, sports or recreational fields, we must ensure that those young people leave our schools well-educated and well-equipped to enter adult life.

The biggest favour we can do the youth of the Northern Territory is to facilitate their opportunities to obtain a good education and capitalise on that for the benefit of the Territory. The member for Stuart talked about some of the difficulties in his electorate and the member for Braitling spoke about education. It is a sad reflection that a sizeable proportion of our young people leave school after attaining less than Year 3 or Year 4 level, and it is difficult for them to catch up. That is a challenge on which we need to concentrate. When compared to that, some of the other areas become window-dressing. If a person feels that he or she is a productive member of society, they will behave in that way. They will behave responsibly and give back to society what it has given to them. Unfortunately, if people have not had that opportunity, the reverse applies.

In relation to the more negative issues, there has to be a concentrated effort in relation to the justice system and how that affects the young people who are caught up in it. Others have talked about mandatory sentencing. I do not wish to talk about that. What I do want to talk about is how we can ensure that people who are caught up in the justice system are treated fairly in the courts. At the reconciliation function in this House, I was told by a person who has worked for a long time in the field of Aboriginal justice that good interpreter services are needed desperately. There must be decent interpreter services in our courts to enable people to obtain justice and to do justice by themselves. A related area is that of health and hearing. Many of those who appear in the courts have had poor hearing since the time of their birth. That problem is exacerbated by a poor understanding of what is happening in the courts. Even those who speak English as a first language and lead reasonably sophisticated

lives find the courts quite intimidating. For those people, it is doubly difficult. If their hearing is poor and they do not have access to interpreter services for their first language, they are in trouble. All too often, young people find themselves in an accelerating cycle. They get into strife, cannot argue their way out of it, end up in court, become part of the criminal justice system and are fined or sent to jail. That is how the cycle begins.

I do not want to focus on the negatives, but rather on the positives. I want to focus on the positives and make some observations about the work that is being done in my electorate by dedicated people to improve the situation for young people. As other members have said, a great deal is being done in sport. I would like to pay tribute to Nigel and Joanne Rush who live in my electorate. They do an enormous amount of work with young people in the sports area. They believe firmly that, if you can give young people self-esteem and a sense of

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achievement through their sporting efforts, even if they are not gifted academically or lack the opportunity to advance academically, they will have a sense of worth that will carry them through. I cannot speak highly enough of the people who are undertaking that work in Tennant Creek.

I had the pleasure of hearing the young people in the Malandari Band in Darwin where they go to school. These 3 young fellows have already recorded their first album. They write their own music. They provide a wonderful role model for other youngsters in the Gulf region. One hopes that, when they have completed their education and return to their communities, they will be able to continue with their music. That is the part of the equation that we sometimes miss. As the member for Braitling said, children who attend boarding school do quite well but often experience problems in their communities because of the lack of jobs there or other activities to occupy their time. They lapse into the drinking syndrome. If they have a firm foundation in some useful activity such as music or sport - in addition to obtaining a job - they will have something to turn to immediately. I believe those young people will become very productive members of our society.

I was interested in the Chief Minister's comment about a family crisis centre. I think that is an excellent idea. Unfortunately, families split all too often, and they include young adults. I wonder whether the Chief Minister aims to provide resources to enable that to occur throughout the Territory and not simply in Darwin. I know it is a problem in my area. Whilst on the subject of resources, I must say that I was encouraged by the Chief Minister's remarks about grants for the provision of alcohol-free entertainment in good venues. There is no dollar figure attached to that in this document and therefore I wonder what he has in mind. I wonder how far the dollars will stretch. Will there be a policy of allocation across the Territory or will it be based

purely on submissions? No doubt there would be a vast response. That is what young people in the smaller communities often miss out on.

In my own community, the young people who get into trouble are not necessarily the ones who leave the town. Others simply become bored and go to larger centres. Young people from the bush come to towns like Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. If they live in Alice Springs or Tennant Creek, they look for a bigger smoke, as we all did as young people. That should not be discouraged because they need to extend their experience of life. However, it is useful to have something that will encourage those young people to return. Many of those young people have returned to Tennant Creek. Luckily, job opportunities are available in Tennant Creek for those who are literate and numerate, although the prospects are not so good for those who lack those skills. For those who do return, there is not much for them to do in a recreational sense unless they are interested in sport. There needs to be some creative thinking about what to do in that regard. That is not to say that people should not take the initiative for themselves. Of course they should. We do not believe that people should be handed entertainment and sporting opportunities galore on a platter. To some degree, people have to act on their own initiative. However, if we wish to keep people in key areas, obviously it is necessary to consider the resource base available to them. If the area is not attractive, they will go somewhere else where things are a little better.

I will be monitoring this policy with interest. During the coming parliamentary recess, I will be talking to young people, educators and people involved with sports. Although the

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debate on this statement will be concluded today, I am sure there will be further opportunity to debate this matter in the House, armed with some feedback from our constituencies.

Mr STONE (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, I thank members for their contributions to the debate on this important policy. It was inevitable that there would be barbs from members opposite about the policy being a long time in coming. The reality is that, across all government departments since self-government, successive Country Liberal Party administrations have been very pro-active in promoting policies in the interests of young Territorians. Extensive ...

Mrs Hickey: Policies - that is right!

Mr STONE: ... scholarship programs have been offered.

The Leader of the Opposition, in her usual whingeing, whining, carping fashion,

continues to interject. The whingeing is almost insufferable ...

Mr Bailey interjecting.

Mr STONE: She is joined by her deputy who also whinges, whines and carps at every opportunity.

Mr Ah Kit: You should have taken your tablets this morning.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr STONE: In contrast, I must acknowledge the very good contribution from the member for Stuart. I can assure him that I will be taking up some of his ideas, particularly those relating to youth in remote areas. He was very positive in his comments, in contrast to his leader and deputy leader who tended, as is their wont, to focus on the negatives. They are looking for the answers now. They completely missed the point that the reason for a youth policy and a round table is to elicit the views of young Territorians who can be the architects and authors of the ultimate policies that affect them. The Leader of the Opposition and her deputy trapeze in here and say: 'What about this? What about that?' They missed the point completely. Is it true that the member for Wanguri is actually the opposition spokesman on youth? I can think of nothing more terrifying than his having the carriage of this because he is the most negative, bitter person in this parliament. I hope that his obvious personality defects will not be passed on to the young Territorians with whom he comes into contact.

I thank members for their contributions. No doubt, over time, all members will have an opportunity to canvass the opinion of young Territorians. I look forward to receiving any feedback that they may like to convey to me that will enable us to continue to enhance this policy. We will ensure that we build and enhance it in a way that is consistent with the aspirations of young Territorians.

Motion agreed to.

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