

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE BOURKE POLICE CITIZENS YOUTH CLUB
BOURKE, NEW SOUTH WALES
6 OCTOBER 2008

I acknowledge the traditional keepers of the land on which we gather, and those who have followed, in safeguarding this important space for the young people of Bourke.

My friends, thank you for your warm welcome to me this morning.

When I arrived in Bourke yesterday afternoon, to embark on my first proper look at your town, I felt very much like Lawson did 117 years ago, a "stranger to the Darling".

But only hours passed before it felt more like I was visiting an old friend, with much to catch up on.

I am so fortunate and privileged in this role to have the opportunity to journey to the heart of communities, to observe their energy and beauty from within, to sense their unique rhythm.

There are certain places in a town that I've come to see as a steady gauge of that rhythm.

Your Police Youth Club is one of those places.

When I was Governor of Queensland, some of the communities I travelled to were remote and enormously difficult to access; their people felt isolated, and many suffered from great disadvantage.

It was the efforts of their leaders, elders and public officers in:

- . uniting those communities,
- . nurturing their purpose and wellbeing,
- . and sharing in the development of their children and young people,

that pulled the dissonant fragments together, healed painful rifts, and knitted the social fabric in the most compassionate and enduring ways.

I recall very clearly and fondly the time I spent on Mornington and Palm Islands, in particular my visits to their PCYCs.

As you know, they are so much more than sporting facilities, though the resources - the basketball courts, the boxing rings, the gyms, and the games - were fantastic and used constantly, every day.

But what they really offered was a reason for young people to gather:

- . to participate in activities that made them feel good about themselves,
- . to make friendships on unthreatening ground;
- . to be very much a part of rebuilding their own community.

It was openly - and sensibly - acknowledged that some of these young people were both victims and perpetrators of crime.

Their natural fear and distrust of authority was responded to with fine adult role models - police officers, elders, senior members of the community - who were respected and admired, and yet had the capacity:

- . to walk in young shoes,
- . to listen without judging,
- . and to encourage the best of spirit and endeavour.

My friends, it's all that *you* have, right here. Be sure to take good care of it, and know that it deserves to be treasured.

Though already well swung, I am delighted now, ladies and gentlemen, to officially open the doors of the Bourke Police Citizens Youth Club.