



**OFFICIAL OPENING
OF
THE IPSWICH COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE
IPSWICH COURT HOUSE
Cnr Limestone and East Streets, Ipswich
Tuesday 22 April 2008
9.45 am**

**Judge Marshall Irwin
Chief Magistrate**

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet. I also acknowledge their enduring wisdom and culture.

It is a privilege to participate in this official opening of the Ipswich Community Legal Service at this courthouse together with the Honourable Kerry Shine MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland, Ms Rachel Nolan, MP for Ipswich and Mr Dan Toombs the CEO of The Advocacy and Support Centre.

This initiative will build on the excellent work by Dan and the Centre through the Disability Law Project and the Community Access Point which have been successfully operating in our Toowoomba Court.

It was only seven months ago that the Attorney and I were involved in the launch of the Community Access Point which provides access to the Centre's services, as well as services in the wider community for the many marginalised people who regrettably come into contact with our criminal justice system.

To adopt Dan's words, Queensland Courts, particularly the Magistrates Court, increasingly serve by default as front-line response to problems of substance abuse, family breakdown, intellectual disability, personality disorders and mental health.

There is strong contemporary research indicating that a person's interaction with the courts is one of many converging issues, the last of which involves criminal activity and consequently contact with our criminal justice system.

That is why our court has been involved in innovative programs such as the Murri Court, the Drug Court, the Homeless Persons Diversion Project, the Special Circumstances List for people with impaired capacity, the Queensland Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program, Q-Merit, the court diversion program for minor drug offences and many more.

This is also why, through our Ipswich Principal Registrar, Jason Schubert, we have again enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to work with Dan and the Centre to provide access to legal services to people in the Ipswich community who might otherwise not have this chance.

I am pleased that these services will include free legal advice, referral and information, covering all aspects of criminal, civil (excluding personal injury) and family law. I note that this will extend where possible to assistance in the preparation of court documents and forms.

This will be a significant benefit not only to the often nervous, confused and overawed people to whom this service will be available but also to our court through the saving of time.

It is essential that whenever possible our courts make their facilities available for use by community legal services.

Our courts must never be stagnant – but contemporary, vibrant and always changing.

This will ensure that they will be an accessible and vital part of the communities that they serve – courts which make a visible difference to the day to day life of everyone who uses them.

In this way – to adopt what I said at the opening of the Community Access Point in Toowoomba – the opening of this Community Legal Service in our court not only points in the right direction for Ipswich – it points in the right direction for Queensland in the future.

It is also in accordance with the vision of our Magistrates Court this year of “reaching out to the community” which we serve.

The Paul Kelly – Kevin Carmody song title “From little things big things grow” is apposite today. Because I have no doubt that with the enthusiasm and energy which has been brought to this project, big things will grow from it.