

15 October 2008

ADJOURNMENT

Lindsay Electorate: Panthers on the Prowl Community Foundation

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (7.40 p.m.) — I rise to acknowledge the valuable work being undertaken by the Panthers on the Prowl Community Foundation in my electorate. Panthers on the Prowl was established in 2000 as a community development foundation with the support of the Penrith Panthers Rugby League Club and the Panthers board of directors. It has also been supported by the Commonwealth since 2005, and I was pleased to join Minister Macklin earlier this year in visiting Panthers on the Prowl and announcing a further funding commitment of \$150,000 for the next 12 months through the Local Answers program.

The concept behind Panthers on the Prowl was to build the capacity of the local community to respond to the needs of families and young people, with a particular focus on promoting healthy lifestyles and targeting children at risk of disengaging with the school system. The programs are based on the philosophy that it is easier to build a fence at the top of the cliff than to provide an ambulance at the bottom. Panthers on the Prowl programs aim to deliver support to local families, including using sport as a motivational tool for secondary school students, a healthy lifestyles program that teaches children about nutrition and exercise, breakfast clubs and the Panthers Bytes Bus, which uses technology to encourage children to learn.

Under the Local Answers program, Panthers on the Prowl also operates a family skills program to foster good parenting skills, including the 'Read with a Mate' night for parents at local schools to promote adult literacy. More than 8,000 students across 10 schools have participated in the healthy lifestyles initiatives over the life of the program, and since 2005 more than 120 parents have been supported through the family skills program. In 2002, Panthers on the Prowl joined with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training to establish a classroom at Panthers that works with primary school students with challenging behaviours from local schools. This classroom has given the students an opportunity to learn in a less formal environment, to focus on healthy eating and exercise and to interact with their rugby league heroes, and over the last six years it has helped 200 students.

I recently attended the launch of an evaluation report by the University of Western Sydney into the Panthers on the Prowl Local Answers program for the period 2005 to 2007. The report's findings were that the programs being run by Panthers on the Prowl were having a noticeable and lasting impact on the behaviour of the children participating, improving their attitudes towards learning and giving them important tools to communicate with others. To quote from one of the students interviewed for the evaluation, 'Coming to this classroom—it's better than school.' The report also found that the programs helped improve the skills of parents and break down some of the barriers between parent and child and parent and school.

The strength of the programs run by Panthers on the Prowl lies in the valuable community partnerships they have built up over the past eight years. This includes partnerships with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, the Nepean Division of General Practice, Mission Australia



and the University of Western Sydney. It has also attracted the support of local businesses and large corporations, including Cabe, MJ Seymour and Co., Westfield Penrith, CUA and Sanyo, who have put their faith and sponsorship power behind the important work being done.

One of the most important partnerships is, of course, the one that has been established with the Penrith Panthers Rugby League Club. Over the past eight years, most if not all of the players at the club have been involved in the programs that are run by Panthers on the Prowl. This includes 68 players who have trained as teachers aides in the last three years.

We all acknowledge the important place professional sportspeople have in the hearts of Australians. This is particularly the case for young people, who look to these athletes as role models both on and off the field. There is often far too little attention paid to the valuable work they do in supporting the communities that support them with such enthusiasm. Panthers on the Prowl is one such story that should be given a great deal of attention because it demonstrates the success that partnerships between local sporting clubs and the community can generate.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts and support of the Panthers board of directors, in particular the Chairman, Barry Walsh; Richard Booth; David Reid; Todd Shepherd; Rex Wright; Panthers CEO, Glenn Matthews; Lou Zivanovic; Mark Myles; and Mike Seymour. Panthers on the Prowl is a national and international model of excellence for the building of social capital. I look forward to seeing this initiative strengthen the linkages between sport, education and the community, and continue to deliver results for local families.