



**Shared Visions
disability conference 2009**

Minister's address

Thursday 2 April, 2009



MS ROBYN MOORE: Now to our opening address. It gives me great pleasure to tell you a bit about your Minister for Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs, Anastacia Palaszczuk. Anastasia was raised in the Brisbane suburb of Durak and followed in her dad's footsteps, winning her father's seat of Inala after his retirement. She was the first female representative for the area, which is wonderful.

In 2006 in her inaugural speech, Anastasia said studying in the London school of economics in 1996 and '97 opened her eyes to a different world. She said without ideas and vision we become lost and unchallenged. So here this morning to challenge us and unite us in a shared vision is your Minister, Anastacia Palaszczuk.

HON ANNASTACIA PALASZCZUK: Well, good morning, everybody. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and elders of the land on which we meet and I would like to thank Auntie Carol for her warm welcome. I would also like to acknowledge my good friend and Queensland parliamentary colleague, the member for Sandgate for attending this morning. Thank you very much for taking time out of your very busy schedule to be here. I would like to acknowledge the chairperson of Disability Council of Queensland and my good friend Paul Larkham, members of all the regional Disability Councils, people with a disability, their families and carers, representatives from the non-government organisations, all other delegates across Queensland and of course the director-general of the department of communities, Linda Apelt.

It's a great pleasure to be here today at the Shared Visions disability conference for 2009.

I'm happy to see so many people embarking on the beautiful journey that is Shared Visions. There has been a tremendous amount of interest from the sector as shown in the record 77 abstracts submitted for this conference. I also want to thank the staff from Disability Services Queensland who have put together this wonderful conference.

Yesterday, I met with my Federal counterpart, the Honourable Bill Shorten at the National Press Club in Canberra. During this meeting we discussed the importance of shaping a national agenda for the disability services sector. I am committed to working closely with the Federal Government to provide a whole new vision for how we look at disability services and together we will redefine who we are and what we are doing.

On an international level last year, a significant milestone was reached with the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It was a very proud moment for Australia, as part of one of the first Western countries to officially sign on to protect and strengthen the rights of people with a disability. While Australia and Queensland have a long-standing commitment to upholding and safeguarding these rights, the Convention is a major step forward.

A key achievement for the Bligh Government is its contribution to Australia's National Disability Agreement. The agreement which comes into effect this year moves towards bringing all Australian Governments into line through national reform. Central to the national reform is a commitment to increase social inclusion and economic participation of people with a disability, secure the opportunity for people with a disability to live as independently as possible and ensure the provision of support to as many families and carers as possible.

An exciting initiative arising out of the 20 20 summit is the concept of a national disability insurance scheme. This is something I'm very keen to explore as I believe it would provide families with an extra safeguard when faced with the financial challenges associated with the person who has a disability. Bill Shorten yesterday at the press club said, "The proposed scheme will be based on the no-fault workers' compensation model and provide support on a needs basis for people with serious disabilities." This is a big idea. It's as big as the original idea of Medibank. It will turn our current system of providing disability services on its head.

Instead of funding services for people with disabilities to find (knowing we are not funding enough) this proposed new approach will provide an individualised, lifetime care and support for each person from the point of diagnosis.

This is a Federal initiative which they will continue to develop and I'm confident that Bill Shorten, when he addresses the conference tomorrow, will talk to you more about this very important initiative.

The Bligh Government's Toward Q2 strategy is delivering a fairer community, one which better supports people with a disability. Another milestone has been the introduction of the disability service quality system and I'm pleased that Queensland is seen as a national leader on this initiative. This system which has certified about 250 service providers means the standard is maintained which ensures you are all working within a quality industry with a defined standard.

Ultimately, this means much greater confidence for people with a disability in the carers. The implementation of the disability services Act 2006 has also been a huge source of comfort for many people in the sector, not least the families and carers. The Act has created many benefits, notably greater protection from abuse and neglect for Queenslanders with a disability, increased sense of wellbeing and greater participation of people with a disability in their local communities and strengthening of government and community partnerships.

More good news for the sector has been the establishment of the Office for Carers to support implementation of the Queensland Carers Recognition Act 2008. Another piece of welcome news is for Younger People with a Disability in Residential Aged Care initiative. This aims to reduce the number of younger people with disabilities who are living in residential aged care facilities. We have already made progress in moving younger people out to more appropriate accommodation and I personally look forward to advancing this initiative. I even have some local units being built at the moment in my electorate of Inala which I fully support and hopefully these will be up and running in the next couple of years.

Despite our achievements thus far, I acknowledge there is much more work to be done. The significant reforms already being implemented by DSQ as part of the Growing Stronger initiative will help us meet outstanding challenges but more needs to be done. A contemporary and innovative disability service system builds resilience and strengthens our community. It promotes independence, not dependence and it enhances family and community networks.

The Bligh government will continue to work in close collaboration with you, our non-government partners and people with a disability to develop the strongest disability service system and a fairer Queensland. To this end, now is the time to outline our vision for the next 10 years. Where do we see ourselves in a decade?

This is a conversation that I want to have with all of you over the coming months to set out a bold plan of reform and action. I plan to take this vision through Cabinet later this year. I will continue to work towards shaping the system that better facilitates and connects people to community services.

I would like to outline my priorities.

- I would like to lead reforms which develop early intervention strategies, particularly for children aged up to six years of age.
- Secondly, develop a system that is flexible enough to address demographic pressures, particularly on our aging carers.
- Thirdly, assist young people with a disability moving out of nursing homes.
- Fourthly, discuss with service providers where there is overlap, where we can improve on things and how we can do things much better.

Behind all of these priorities of mine is a commitment to take into account fundamentally the rights of the individual, the rights of the individual to make choices and to involve families and carers in the planning. Together, I think we can achieve this balance.

One of my key priorities is to focus on early intervention. Already in Queensland, we have seen the launch of the autism initiative, Disability Services Queensland also has family and early childhood services teams that provide direct support for children aged 0 to 6 years who are or at risk of significantly developmental delay including children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder. We also have the family support program that employs program facilitators to assist families to plan and build capacity, to provide ongoing care for their son or daughter but we can do more.

We now have a great opportunity. We have a Federal Labor government that is prepared to listen and the Bligh government, who is committed to delivering a fairer Queensland for all people. Yesterday, I discussed this issue at length with my Commonwealth counterpart Bill Shorten, parliamentary secretary for disability services and children's services. We have planned a meeting in May to discuss in depth how we can expand these strategies. My first commitment as Queensland Minister for Disability Services is to improve the lives of people with a disability. Together, we can work on this issue.

I realise that it will not happen overnight but I am absolutely committed to making it happen. Together, I know we can make a difference. Let us think creatively outside the square.

To this end I am planning to hold and convene a Ministerial Roundtable at the end of this month with key stakeholders, including families, to discuss this issue at length and to take something down to Canberra so Queensland can set the agenda and lead the way in disability services.

My previous experience in disability services was as senior policy adviser to the former Minister and I believe it provides me with a solid platform to deliver reforms across the sector.

During this time I gained an understanding and appreciation of the complexities and intricacies of this very important sector and as the new Minister for Disability Services and as a representative of the Bligh government, I now join you in accepting that responsibility. I come to you with great enthusiasm and drive to embrace all the challenges and opportunities that come with this very, very important job.

I embark on this journey with the aim of creating a fairer Queensland for those people with a disability and for those people who support them. And that is the reason we're all here today. As Minister, I commit to working with the industry in a collective push towards improving the quality of life for the people with a disability throughout Queensland.

I also just wanted to share with you that although I was working in the Minister's office and I was involved with policy direction, in my first term as a member of parliament I actually got to meet families and individuals first-hand. I would just like to share two brief experiences.

Ellen has given me permission to discuss this with you. Ellen is my age and four years ago she was diagnosed with Huntington's disease. I went to visit Ellen in her home and she was confined to her lounge room and her mother had to carry her out the door because she did not know she could access any supports at all.

They thought because they were on a senior disability support pension that was where the system stopped. I was able to convene a meeting with health and disability services and I went to visit Ellen again a couple of days ago and she was sitting out the front of her new deck with wheelchair access so now the ambulance can come and go as needs be.

This small step of modifying her bathroom and bedroom and having access to the outside world has made an incredible difference to her life and if we can just do this for people out there it's going to make their lives a little easier.

The second story I wanted to share with you is Angela. Angela came to see me - I hold a mobile office at Carol Park where basically people can drop in and talk to me about any issues they want to discuss and Angela came to see me because she was concerned there were syringes out the front of her house and people were congregating at night and she felt unsafe so we were talking to council trying to get the matter cleaned up. I talked to Angela for about half an hour and as she was leaving she said to me, "I'm having trouble getting that wheelchair in and out of my house." I said, "I'm sorry." She said, "Well, my son, he has muscular dystrophy and we can't get the wheelchair in and out of the house so I'm having to carry him all the time." I said, "I'm sorry, have you been in contact with Disability Services." "No, can they help me?" "Yes, have you been in contact with the department of housing to do home modifications?" "No, can they help as well?" There are so many people out there who don't know there are services that they can access that will make a difference to their lives.

Angela is now moving into a home that is going to be modified for her son and she is also getting assistance through Disability Services. I just wanted to share with you those two stories so you would know I have actually been dealing with these issues on a daily basis in my local role as a member of parliament.

In conclusion, I just wanted to say that I'm very, very excited about being appointed the Minister for this area. It is an area that I'm passionate about and I believe that together we can make some significant reforms. It's going to be a journey, it's going to be a bit of a roller-coaster ride but I hope you will all come with me on that journey and share with me your experiences and together we can make real change and a real difference. Thank you very much.