

Chaplains Speech - 3 minutes (540 words)

Deputy Speaker, I rise today to inform the House about a wonderful group of people whose hard work and dedication often goes unnoticed.

I am speaking about School Chaplains, or 'Chappies' and in particular School Chaplains in South East Queensland, and my electorate of Forde.

I was delighted to recently attend the 15th annual Beenleigh Region Chaplaincy Service dinner and fundraiser, which was a night full of great food, great company, and overwhelming generosity.

According to S.U. Chaplaincy, who collected information about its members and their activities throughout 2021, there are around 900 'Chappies' currently working in Queensland schools, 63% of whom are women, 37% men, with an average age of 44 years.

The minimum qualification requirement to become a School Chaplain is a Cert 4; 98 per cent of all School Chaplains meet or exceed the minimum qualification level.

Fifteen percent are post-graduates; 23% have bachelor's degrees; 40% have Diplomas or Advanced Diplomas; and 18% a Cert. 4.

Chaplains provide an invaluable service in schools across Queensland, including in my electorate of Forde, covering the Logan City and Northern Gold Coast regions.

They provide social, emotional, and spiritual support to school communities, while also contributing to the overall wellbeing strategies and educational goals of our schools.

School Chaplains are also role models and mentors, as they promote opportunities for students, staff, and their families to explore their own spirituality, and what it means to them.

It is estimated that every year across Queensland 'Chappies' have more than 150-thousand formal conversations with students and almost 400-thousand informal chats.

What do they talk about?

- Bullying
- Friendship and peer issues
- Mental Health - anxiety & depression
- Family breakdowns
- General school behaviour

Every week School Chaplains support more than 2,000 classes; they have pastoral conversations with almost 14,000 students; more than 5,500 staff; and almost 2,500 with parents/carers.

And here is what students say: "Chappy helped lift me out of the dark hole I was in... she always managed to understand what I was going through. I owe her more than I can think of."

School Chaplains are available to everyone, but they are particularly invested in supporting individuals and groups who could be considered 'at-risk.'

Young people whose parents may be in prison; from Indigenous communities; Defence Force families; who are culturally and

linguistically diverse; refugees; or students with disabilities and special needs.

Through early intervention activities and pastoral support, Chappies increase the chances of these young people experiencing better life outcomes.

As one Deputy Principal observed: "... Chappy is really connecting with our young students who are disengaged in the classroom - the ones who really struggle to make friends and don't really want to be at school."

As well as their pastoral role, School Chaplains play a vital link in connecting schools and communities, working with volunteers to provide such services as the 'Brekky' club - they are testament to the adage that 'it takes a village to raise a child.

Deputy Speaker, I believe the role of School Chaplains should not just be applauded, but promoted and supported wholeheartedly by Governments, at all levels across Australia.