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SPEECH

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Speaker Furner, Sen Mark

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Senator FURNER (Queensland) (7.11 pm)—This evening I rise to speak on one of my passions: multiculturalism. On the morning of Friday, 19 September I attended the annual general meeting of ACCES Services Inc. Like most AGMs the meeting proceeded with the normal protocols in delivering the reports of activities throughout the previous financial year. However, this AGM had a special feature, with entertainment from Burundian drummers beating their drums with such pride throughout the morning. The morning address commenced with Edgar Venegas, who works in the youth department at ACCES Services. In his opening comments, Edgar acknowledged some of the young people who were there on the day. He indicated that the youth of today are the future of our society, and quickly mentioned the launch, on 29 September, of a new youth space called the YZone.

Edgar went on to introduce Ken Houliston, the executive director for The Spot. The Spot recently has formed a relationship with ACCES and other community organisations in the Logan West community. Ken explained his heritage as having been born in New Guinea and having spent his first four or five years there appreciating different cultures from an early age. He explained his discovery of his upbringing as being one where his parents and the people who lived in that era tried to make everybody like them. They went into different cultures and tried to make them like us. He went on to indicate how glad he was that cultures have come into the Western way and kept their culture, because diversity is so important. Ken's analogy on this is:

You just got to walk through a garden, just walk through a suburb and you see colour everywhere. Why should we want to change that? Humans come in different shapes, colours, different cultures and backgrounds. I believe for us to co-habit together, to bring colour to each other and to bring joy to each other. And seeing that in a collaborative and diverse way that we bring to our community.

Ken explained that the services at The Spot office are different to what ACCES offers, but together they bring great strength to the community. He went on to honour ACCES and the services that they bring—not just to the Logan community but to a wider community—because what ACCES do is so important. He identified the many people in the room whose integration into the Australian community would have been so much

harder had ACCES not existed. In summary, Ken said he was glad that they were here because they bring to the community life, colour and rhythm that we would not otherwise have.

The guest speaker at the event was the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, the Hon. Laurie Ferguson. Laurie likened the area of Logan to his area of Granville-Auburn, which is the most Islamic electorate in the country, has the second highest number of Chinese people and has a very high proportion of new arrivals. Laurie took the opportunity to acknowledge the important role ACCES plays in the life of Queensland's refugee and migrant community. He indicated he had been coming to Queensland for a number of years and that the changes in Queensland, with its increasingly vibrant and diverse cultures, were very visible.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 87,000 entrants have arrived in Queensland over the past five years. They include 50,000 skilled migrants and nearly 31,000 family migrants. Of those, 15 per cent have selected Logan as their new home—and 6,800 of them, the majority, are from parts of Africa and Afghanistan. ACCES has had a very direct impact on the early settlement experiences of these new arrivals, which in turn casts their views on their new home and shapes the lives they ultimately lead in this country.

We know that unsatisfactory early settlement experiences can spell hardship, family upheaval, inability to engage fully in this community, deep depression and ultimately a decision to move away. Laurie Ferguson indicated that the Australian government offers one of the most comprehensive settlement programs in the world for people seeking refuge and the chance of a new life. He commented that IHSS has directed more than \$6.5 million in funds for Queensland to assist humanitarian entrants settle into their new home. Over this period, there were more than 1,100 new arrivals in Queensland who received settlement assistance through the humanitarian program. In the past year, more than 13,000 people settled in Australia through the humanitarian program, which has wide support

from the community, reflecting the generous and compassionate nature of the Australian people.

Laurie also stated that the government will increase the humanitarian program by an extra 500 places in the current year, reserved for Iraqis, and, from 2009-10, an extra 750 places for special humanitarian entrants. He also acknowledged some of the other work undertaken by ACCES, including new initiatives such as the Employment Pathways Program, which is recognised as the largest multicultural employment service in Queensland; The Hub, located below the PCYC, which is aimed at improving proficiency in English; and the health clinic, which is the most recent initiative from ACCES. The team will provide a range of medical and allied health services in the Logan-Gold Coast area. The clinic has been developed in response to a need identified by community and health professionals. I would like to acknowledge the work of the volunteers.

Only last week I was fortunate enough to spend some time thoroughly going through the details with this company. I was extremely fortunate to be invited to witness firsthand the very facilities which Laurie referred to in his speech. I was truly astounded by the level of commitment and passion among the professional staff of ACCES who provide services to refugees in south-east Queensland. Experiencing the workings of The Hub, the medical and allied health services clinic and the volunteers class in practice made the morning's visit such an inspiration. I was amazed at the number of Islamic volunteers in the class who were prepared to give their own time to learn about ways of assisting other people in their community. These volunteers have truly embraced our values of respect, a fair go and compassion for those in need. They will go on to develop pride in being Australians.

The next speaker at the AGM was Sergeant Rachel Whitford, the manager of the Logan City PCYC. She spoke in the absence of Cecil Fernandes, ACCES's then chairman. Ironically, I personally know of Cecil through my past career as a union official. In my view, he always demonstrated fairness and professionalism in his relationship with the trade union movement as a human resources manager. And sure enough, indicative of his commitment to these principles, this is reflected in his chairperson's report, in which we see the same outcomes being delivered. In the three years that Cecil was chairperson, the organisation has grown from a staff of 56 and an annual budget of \$1.5 million to a staff of 182 and a budget of \$5 million.

ACCES's mission statement is: through its interventions it endeavours to create a healthy community where people share skills and resources, develop a sense of responsibility for themselves and each other and contribute to a cohesive community that encourages and educates and has the courage to shape

its own future. ACCES has well and truly delivered on its mission statement. Gail Kerr, the general manager of ACCES, is delivering for the migrants who come to our country. In my opinion, ACCES is one of the leading settlement services providers in Logan and in Queensland.