



Hon Ann Bressington MLC

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MEDIA RELEASE

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SOCIAL JUSTICE MP STARTS HER TREK AROUND SOUTH AUSTRALIA IN WHYALLA

Whyalla will be the starting point of Independent MP Ann Bressington's community forums, which will be used to gain insight into the struggles that face many rural and regional South Australians.

The Whyalla forum will be held at the **Westies Football Club** on **Monday the 20th October** from **7:00pm-9:00pm**.

Ann is a "social justice" politician. The first female Independent to be elected to the Legislative Council of South Australia in 150 years, she has vowed to represent issues that negatively impact on families and the welfare of children.

Ann is coming to Whyalla so she can hear YOUR concerns. She will listen to what the people of Whyalla have to say and will take their concerns back to parliament, and where possible will work on legislation that will assist them as well as talk to Government Ministers in an effort to develop policy reform where needed.

About Ann

Ann's only daughter Shay Louise died of a heroin overdose in 1998. In response to this tragedy she founded a recovery-based drug treatment and rehabilitation centre called Drugbeat in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, which she administered as Chief Executive Officer for 12 years. This centre is now funded by both State and Federal governments and offers free services to parents and family members of drug users as well as drug users themselves. The highly successful treatment and rehabilitation service has assisted hundreds of people to get their lives back on track and was the first service in the country to recognise the need to include parents in the program.

"I know the struggles that so many parents face today dealing with a drug-affected child. I also know that in many cases they do not receive the support they want and need from government departments," Ann says.

"Since coming into parliament my eyes have also been opened to the challenges that face many parents when dealing with government departments on a whole range of other issues, such as child abuse, disabilities and Family Law."

Ann cares about the people of this state and wants to make a real difference before her term finishes in 2014. She wants to know she has helped improve the lives of the Aussie battlers who struggle daily to keep their heads above water and keep their families together. She is a mother of five and for 14 years lived and worked as a

single parent, so unlike many in Parliament she is no stranger to hard work and hard times.

“I remember one Christmas where there just wasn’t any money for presents or even a Christmas lunch and it broke my heart to have to tell my kids that they had to do without but we survived those times and that Christmas was probably the most special because we decided that we would give each other a gift that cost us nothing. We sat around in a circle and we took turns at telling each other what we loved about them and why our family was so special and blessed. It ended up being one of the Christmases that my kids remember with fondness.”

Ann was last in Whyalla in July helping a family whose children had been removed based on a report of neglect. Even though there was no medical or physical evidence of neglect, the home of the family came under attack by Families SA and the police who removed the children. Despite being returned to the mother, the two older children are traumatised by the event and three months later still become upset when they recall the incident. Sadly, it was a situation that Ann was all too familiar with. In early 2007 Ann called for a parliamentary inquiry into Families SA after she was approached by numerous families with various problems with the Department. Some of those included teenagers who had left home simply because they did not want to live by family rules, and teenagers who were using drugs and had become abusive and unmanageable. Ann was invited back to Whyalla by those families to hold a public forum to give other families the opportunity to tell their stories and hopefully then be represented in parliament.

“There is a rising feeling of powerlessness in the wider community because families are literally being torn apart by a social policy that seems to see the family as the cause of all dysfunction. As a result so many people are depressed and feel as though no one is willing to listen to them. We have some government departments that consistently interfere and make matters worse rather than supporting parents to keep their family together,” Ann said.

Some of the issues that Ann has addressed since her election are also some of the most difficult such as:

- Family Law
- Child protection
- Abuse and bullying by government departments.
- Workcover
- Drug abuse
- Domestic violence
- School bullying

“Issues such as child protection and drug abuse are the most difficult because governments are reluctant to deal with the unprofessional and dysfunctional behaviour of some of those who work within these departments,” Ann said.

“There is a ‘blueprint’, if you like, of actions taken against victims that are unconscionable and it has been going on for decades. We recently apologised to the children who were abused in state care as a result of the Mulligan report. The motion read that we apologised for not believing the carers, the children and the parents, but it seems that little has changed. If we don’t do things differently and take the time to develop solid legislation and policies then we are simply not doing our job. We are paid by the people to work for the people and that responsibility seems to have been

lost over the past 30 years. Somehow many politicians believe that they are in parliament to play out their own agendas rather than serve the people of this state.”

Ann wants to be remembered as a politician who fought hard for the rights of parents to protect their children and who was able to bring about fundamental changes in government policies to better fulfil the needs of the people they serve. Her speeches in Parliament pull no punches and she speaks honestly to confront the major parties on their attitudes towards the people who pay their wages. She has no time for the tragic games of politics that all-too-often seem to take preference to problem solving. Ann’s opinion is that political spin has become the main focus and that governments seem to have lost focus on what they are paid to do. This forum will provide an opportunity for the people of Whyalla to meet with an honest, dedicated politician with the capacity to remind them.

For further information please contact 8237 9596