NORTHERN TERRITORY
*of* AUSTRALIA

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**HANSARD EXTRACT**

# EDUCATION AI CONFERENCE

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The couch surfing event is directly aligned with the Northern Territory Homelessness Strategy's focus on stepping in early to try to keep young people safe, connected and supported. The event focuses on ensuring our attention is on prevention and intervention because that prevents long-term harm, keeps young people engaged in school and community and stops short-term instability from becoming lifelong disadvantage.

Youth homelessness in the Northern Territory is the responsibility of all of us. It cannot be addressed by any single organisation, government department or policy. The Northern Territory has the highest rate of homelessness in Australia, more than 12 times the national average. Nearly half of all people experiencing homelessness here are under the age of 25. More than 3,000 people in the Northern Territory every night are experiencing homelessness. It is an extraordinary figure. The key drivers include things we talk about a lot in this Chamber and we are all familiar with, including family violence, poverty, mental health challenges and lack of affordable housing.

Last year's Anglicare NT rental affordability snapshot found only four rental properties across the Northern Territory that were affordable for households relying on income support. It is an impossible situation for people who do not have access to the resources needed to have safe housing.

Couch surfing is a fun event but, as I said, it also has a serious aspect. I was proud to wave off a couple of the couches—as did the new Member for Nightcliff—as they set off. It is always a little hairy because they are going in all directions. That is not how I broke my arm, but it could have been. The serious aspect of the event tries to make clear the situation that so many of our young people are in across the Territory and has clear calls for actions we can take.

The other thing we are always talking about in this Chamber is not rabbiting on about what the problems are, but what can we do to solve them. Anglicare, which coordinates that event, says that we need stronger coordination across services; clearer pathways for young people to access support; policies and programs that are informed by lived experience; real investment in prevention; services resourced to meet demand; more housing so that young people have a place to go; and leadership that acts with purpose and urgency.

Youth homelessness affects all of us. It undermines safety and young people's futures and, therefore, undermines our community's future. It places young people at increased risk of harm while weakening the social and economic fabric of our Territory as a whole.

I urge everyone in the Assembly to do whatever you can, in whatever way you can, to address this issue. I have known many people who had to couch surf because they had nowhere safe to go, which is a tragedy in a community and a country as wealthy as ours.

I thank Anglicare NT for the work it does to bring this issue to everyone's attention in a way that is fun, engaging and puts young people front and centre.

**Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim):** Madam Speaker, on 30 April it was my pleasure to deputise for the minister for Education in my capacity as the assistant minister to speak at the Artificial Intelligence in Education Conference. It was the first time we have had something like that in the Northern Territory, and it could not have been more timely or important for us to start talking about how to wrap our heads around AI encroaching on everyday classroom teaching.

A range of people attended—not as many as I would have liked to have seen, truth be told—including significant people from our public schools, private school sector, independent schools and religious institutions. We had people from Larrakeyah Primary, Mother Teresa Catholic Primary, the School of Distance Education, Haileybury and CDU.

It was an important opportunity to discuss how we will improve educational outcomes in the Northern Territory by harnessing AI tools rather than staying in denial about them. I preface my remarks by saying that I have previously spoken about the importance of leaning in, rather than being in denial about all things AI related. A 2025 global study on trust in AI and attitudes towards it found that Australia was basically the place that was most worried and least excited about it—that is, we are risk-averse and worried about all sorts of things going wrong and not leaning in to try to utilise these technologies in a purposeful way.

Before speaking in some depth about what was said the other day, I draw out Larrakeyah Primary School as a fantastic primary school that took the initiative, under Principal Fathma Mauger and Assistant Principal Danni Mattiazzo, to create something it calls 'IntelliLearn'. The Member for Port Darwin, who is the local member, also referenced this in a speech recently. The school took an LLM, paid money to put a skin around it and gave it some parameters. It is being used for kids in Year 5 to help them write better and improve their vocabulary.

Kids are doing creative writing tasks within guardrails with AI technologies which are helping them make choices to improve sentence structure and describe things better, in essence, improving their written work.

The conference was a fantastic opportunity for educators to get together and learn what is happening in this space. Toddle representative Melissa O'Shea was there. Toddle is one of the workflow engines being used to try to utilise AI in teaching spaces and improve workflow, particularly where there are capacity deficits in teaching and/or change management or transitions are happening within school systems. That sounds familiar, given what we will experience in the Northern Territory. My old school, Sanderson High, was a middle school and is now back to being a high school. The Member for Nightcliff may be interested, with Nightcliff Middle soon becoming Nightcliff High and Dripstone too. These schools will need help to make smart transitions to ensure they are full-service full-suite schools providing educational offerings and outcomes for all their students.

On the other end of the spectrum, Andrew McGregor from Haileybury spoke on a panel of principals about what his school is doing to try to improve educational outcomes by utilising AI technologies. Haileybury is trying to do innovative work, and it is probably making a difference, as you can see reflected in its VCE results. I congratulate Haileybury for being forward thinking, unlike a lot of schools and educational institutions. Instead of saying, 'Do not touch these things; they will dumb you down', Haileybury is accepting that they are part of our modern landscape and we need to lean in to using them in a sensible way.

Andrew McGregor is a maths teacher. My dad was a maths teacher as well. I remember both of them telling me in different forms, 'I am a maths teacher. How many new ways can I be taught to teach maths?' However, it turns out that there are new ways and new technologies, and we need to lean into some of them.

Going to the substance of what I spoke about at the conference. I was pleased to represent Hon Jo Hersey, Minister for Education and Training. We were there to, in a sense, lay the foundations and the groundwork for government policy in this area.

The first thing to note was that our schools span vast distances across urban centres, regional towns and remote and very remote communities, as well as through distance education. We know about the diversity of our school bodies. We recognise the enormous potential of AI to enhance teaching and learning, but equally we are clear that the technology needs to support education, not drive it. The key point we wanted to get across was that human connection, professional judgement and cultural knowledge remain at the heart of learning in the Territory.

We discussed the Education ministers' framework for generative AI in schools from February 2023 and, likewise, the work the Department of Education and Training did late last year to create a generative AI policy aligning with its strategic plan, the national framework and the NT Government's AI ethics policies. Those policies reinforce that we want responsible and well-planned use of generative AI with strong safeguards for privacy, security and inclusivity.

We want opportunities in this space and for our teachers, as well as our students, to have the necessary professional development, training, tools and processes to meaningfully and positively use AI. Let me be clear, as I was on the day to the panel and the conference: AI is a support tool. This government wants teachers to remain in control and professional judgement to remain paramount because we recognise that there are challenges in this space. Protecting student data and privacy, ensuring age-appropriate use and managing bias, inaccuracies and varying levels of digital literacy are all important considerations when you are touching AI tools. The challenges are not unique to the NT, but they are amplified by our diversity. That is why we are taking a staged approach in this matter.

The government's priorities in this space are threefold and clear. The first is improved digital literacy so that we improve trust in our systems through helping students and teachers to understand not just how to use AI tools but also how AI works, its limitations and how to keep applying their own critical judgement.

Second is ethical implementation by ensuring that only low and medium-risk tools are approved and that these are supported by privacy and security assessments and, where appropriate, we run pilots to test that things are safe and have real educational value.

Third is partnerships with industry, universities, other jurisdictions and across government. Our government is already doing some of that in collaboration with the South Australian Department for Education on a pilot of EdChat, an AI tool specifically designed for safe use in schools. Hopefully, we will learn from that partnership and can work out what is suitable for use in Northern Territory public education settings.

Our vision is clear: we want students who can use digital tools safely, confidently and critically. We want communities who can trust that innovation is introduced responsibly with integrity and a focus on strengthening learning. We know that success means fair access to safe and appropriate tools, reducing the administrative load for educators and stronger learning support where it is needed the most. As a result, the government will continue to take a staged careful approach to evaluate some of the pilots I have discussed, listening to school feedback and refining our strategies to reflect the realities of education in the Northern Territory. AI will only strengthen education if it strengthens people. That is the government's guiding principle.

It is important to recognise that the world is moving fast on this front and we have to be on the ball or we will be in trouble soon. One of the places that moves slowest in terms of technology adoption in Australia is the High Court of Australia. A recent lecture delivered by Chief Justice Stephen Gageler to all the Justices of the Supreme Court of Japan pointed out—Attorney-General, this may be of interest to you—that the High Court is starting to use AI tools, approved officially. It has systems not to produce judgements but to do a lot of the preliminary work.

We will find increasingly that this will catch up with all of us in this House and in the education space in particular. It is important that we all have some connection to what is happening in the technology and artificial intelligence spaces. In terms of improving productivity in our society and educational outcomes for our kids, we will all have to become AI savvy going forward.

On that note, I thank the Assembly for its indulgence.

**Mr SMELT (Nightcliff):** Madam Speaker, I reflect on the works that are occurring on the Nightcliff Jetty.

The Nightcliff Jetty is an icon of Nightcliff, Rapid Creek and Coconut Grove, which I represent. It is a mecca for everyone in Darwin, people from across the Top End, tourists and locals. It is a place where families come to relax, have dinner, meet with friends and enjoy the sunset. Parents take their kids and teach them to fish, enjoy the view or exercise in our great environment.

Unfortunately, the Nightcliff Jetty has been in an ongoing state of decline. There has been rust, timber deterioration, delamination and section loss.

I spoke a lot about the iconic Nightcliff Jetty during the Nightcliff by-election; it became a key theme, and it gained a lot of traction and interest from our local community. Indeed, there was a strong outpouring of support for the upgrade and preservation of the Nightcliff Jetty.

Thus I was pleased—and somewhat surprised, I must admit—to receive the notice from the minister's office regarding the upgrade works for the Nightcliff Jetty. The works to improve user safety and extend the life of the structure include surface corrosion treatment; high-pressure water blasting of the walkway structure; removal of timber decking for high-pressure water blasting; installation of new timber decking; repairs and installation of handrails; installation of a new gate at the top of the steps at the jetty head; and installation of additional structural support where required.

I am pleased that all these works are happening so soon after the Nightcliff by-election. The only fly in the ointment was that there was only four days' notice to the community before the jetty was shut for works. This has caused concern in the local community. A number of issues were raised, including by stakeholders such as the Amateur Fishermen's Association NT. Losing access to the jetty for two months over the peak of the Dry Season, including school holidays, is a blow for locals and tourists who are keen to get out, use the jetty and enjoy their fishing. I will continue to follow the progress of the works and seek support from the minister to consider some form of access, especially over the school holidays, as proposed by AFANT.

This is a great development, and I am pleased to see that local advocacy during the Nightcliff by-election has been turned into action so quickly. Community fought for this, and together we made this happen. This is just the beginning for Nightcliff.

**Mr PATEL (Casuarina):** Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the amazing community organisations across the Casuarina electorate, including the staff and volunteers who put in so much work behind the scenes. We are lucky to have so many people in our community who are passionate about supporting others and making a difference every day.

I start by recognising Carpentaria and the participants involved in the Nailed It woodworking program. Each time I see the work coming out of that program, I am genuinely impressed by the talent, creativity and care that goes into each piece.