



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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CHILD PROTECTION; SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (2.10 a.m.): I rise to speak on the protection of children and how community organisations are becoming involved in an issue that is becoming a major problem in our society. It is good to see so many community organisations taking up the challenge to educate parents and children on child safety issues and protection. I refer in particular to the Scouts Australia education program aimed at helping parents talk about child abuse. The book and program is built around the basis that 'teaching is a matter of transmitting knowledge, and educating is a matter of building personality'.

Last week I attended the Kingaroy launch of the scouts' book *Protecting your children-A parent's guide*. It states that seven out of every 10 Queensland children will have experienced sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect or poverty by the time they reach 18. The large number of children suffering from abuse is alarming. It is a disgrace that those figures reflect the attitude of our society because, unfortunately and historically, children have been accorded little, if any, status in society.

Making children aware through child abuse education makes them less vulnerable and does not take away their innocence, as some people may want us to believe. I congratulate the scouting movement for its input into such a sensitive area. It is a known fact that many of our young people, the very children our future will have to rely on, lack self-esteem. The reason for that can, in most cases, be traced back to some form of abuse in earlier life experiences. It is also a proven fact that parents who establish open communication about child abuse have children who are more effective at fending off assaults, and this book is aimed at teaching parents and their children to protect themselves. It presents ideas and strategies that will assist parents to openly communicate with their children. I commend the booklet to anyone who is interested in helping to stop child abuse.

The second issue that I wish to speak on is that of schools in rural areas. In particular, I am concerned about two small schools in my electorate, one at Upper Yarraman and the other at Toogoolawah. Upper Yarraman has been recommended for closure and Toogoolawah has a chronic teacher shortage. I can commiserate with the dilemma faced by the Education Department; it is very expensive to keep small state schools open in very small rural communities. But as is the case with so many of these small schools, they are an integral part of a region's history. Generations of the same families usually have attended these schools, and in many cases it is the parents who help sustain the schools through fundraising. They are also an important part of any rural community as they are in most cases a focal point for social interaction.

Farming families who get up at first light and work long, hard days for next to nothing have the added expense of getting their children to schools far removed from their local schools when they are closed. In many cases, such as at Upper Yarraman State School, young children may soon have to spend up to an extra hour or more a day travelling to the next nearest school. These kids not only have to attend school; they help on the family farm as well as having the onus of homework. This is where their work ethic comes in. They learn from an early age the work ethic, and I doubt there are very many urban children who could work the long hours or carry out the duties that many rural children experience.

I urge the Education Department to look more closely at the impact that small school closures have on a community as a whole and examine a way to stop the closure of these rural schools. In many instances, the school is not as big an impost on the Education budget as many smaller urban ones.