



Speech by

## Karen Struthers

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Hansard Tuesday, 17 April 2007

---

### FOREST LAKE, COMMUNITY KINDERGARTEN; FEDERAL LABOR

**Ms STRUTHERS** (Algeria—ALP) (11.44 am): I want to commend the initiative of a group of switched-on women in my local area at Forest Lake, led by Belinda Bishca. Belinda and many other women contacted me late last year and wrote to me in February this year about the fact that they are keen to set up a community kindergarten in the Forest Lake area. These women know the value of children having access to high-quality early childhood services. They are determined in their efforts. They have gained the support of the Creche and Kindergarten Association. Let me put on record today my admiration for C&K and the wonderful community based child-care services they operate around the state.

They have also approached the member for Inala, Anastacia Palaszczuk, who has offered to give them assistance. They are seeking land that could be suitable for the construction of a new community based kindy. That is no easy feat, though. Our efforts locally to track down land and/or build a partnership with the local schools are continuing. I seek leave to table a nonconforming petition comprising 249 signatures from local residents seeking to establish a kindy.

Leave granted.

*Tabled paper:* Non-conforming petition seeking a dedicated C&K kindergarten within the community of Forest Lake.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I have also forwarded this petition to the minister for communities, the Hon. Warren Pitt, for his consideration. But sadly there is no joy from the federal government in relation to community based child-care services. It was the Howard government that cut the national subsidy to community based services a number of years ago forcing many community based early childhood services out of business, paving the way for predatory practices from large national private child-care companies to really suck up all these community based centres that were going down the drain. It is great to see C&K have a strong base nationally and within Queensland.

I want to put on record today my praise too for the policies launched by federal Labor leader Kevin Rudd. It is very easy to see why the sun is shining on Mr Rudd and the sun is going down on Mr Howard. Mr Rudd has launched an historic \$450 million national investment to boost early education and care for young children in a universal entitlement to 15 hours a week of high-quality play based learning for all four year olds. This commitment, coupled with \$200 million to establish child-care and preschool services on school sites, aims to better equip young children to participate and excel at their school work.

That is not where it stops for children. Kevin Rudd and shadow ministers Nicola Roxon and Jenny Macklin have also made an historic commitment to battle the bulge for overweight and obese children. Federal Labor will work with the state, territory, Catholic and independent school sectors to implement a number of things. One of these very important initiatives is a healthy kids check which will be done for every child when they start school. They will also introduce a healthy habits for life guide which will be provided to parents when they enrol their children at school. It will include advice and practical information for them to help their children develop healthy habits.

Federal Labor will also roll out the Australian early development index. This index will help teachers and parents identify any developmental issues for their children which will require attention. These initiatives are in line with the Beattie government's commitment to combat diabetes, childhood obesity and chronic disease with a multifaceted strategy to tackle these very alarming health issues. It includes the

ongoing promotion of our healthy eating habits programs, our be active programs in both Queensland Health and Education Queensland.

It is concerning that type 2 diabetes is increasingly being diagnosed in children. This increase is almost certainly a result of the skyrocketing rates of young children suffering from obesity. It is disturbing to learn that during the last three decades there have also been increases in child mental health disorders and developmental problems such as autism. Most disturbing is the fact that Indigenous children suffer from excessively high rates of chronic diseases. Figures released recently show that 23 per cent of Aboriginal children have had asthma at some time during their young lives and 12 per cent of Aboriginal children have had recurring chest infections. Most shameful of all, the life expectancy of an Indigenous child born today is still almost 20 years less than that of non-Indigenous children.

There is a lot to do in these areas. I am pleased to be part of a Labor state government and a Labor federal opposition that is paving the way to tackle these very important issues. What does the Howard federal government do? It cuts its share of funding in the Commonwealth-state health agreement. This agreement was designed to be a 50-50 share arrangement. What do we see now? We see a 65-35 share with Queensland putting 65 per cent of health funds into our public hospitals. We need support from the federal government. We need a Rudd led federal government.