



Speech By
Peter Russo

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

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ADJOURNMENT

Child Protection

 **Mr RUSSO** (Sunnybank—ALP) (8.59 pm): Tonight I rise to speak on a matter of concern to us all: the future of those children at risk of neglect and abuse who are being taken into care here in Queensland. I commend the Premier and the Minister for Child Safety for their work in rolling out the recommendations of the Carmody report and the work that is being undertaken in the secondary-level child protection system. The Queensland statistics speak for themselves. In 2014 in Brisbane alone, there were almost 500 substantiated investigations into abuse of children aged between the ages of zero and six. Many of us sitting here in parliament will know of the areas where high risk exists. Many of us will have such areas in our electorates.

Let us be clear: the issues those families face are immense, often including a mix of unemployment, unstable relationships, substance abuse, mental health issues, unsuitable housing and poor communication skills. Many of the parents were once children who themselves suffered abuse and neglect. At birth their babies are as bright and bubbly as anyone's, yet by three years of age they are lagging in language and cognitive skills. Research has shown that young children who are burdened by significant adversity and whose stress systems are overactivated can suffer impairment to their maturing brain circuits, resulting in an increased probability of long-term learning and behavioural issues. It is time to break the cycle.

I raise this matter after extensive consultation with the Acacia Ridge & Districts Community Centre in my electorate. The organisation has worked to forge partnerships with Community in North Brisbane, Janet Williams-Smith from Early Childhood Management Services, the Queensland University of Technology and the Kyabra Community Association, an experienced southside family support provider. It draws on local businesses, schools, services and community members. In fact, this model already has the support of the broad community and has attracted donations from business and community members to provide the resources to design the model. Costings of the initiative show that the program can work much more effectively and be much more cost effective than out-of-home care.

For years governments have attempted to address this complex issue, yet we continue to see intergenerational poverty, not just in monetary terms but also in terms of hopes, expectations and flourishing children and youth. It is time we backed communities that have the interests of their children at heart.