




Speech By
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ADJOURNMENT

Autism Awareness Month

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (7.21 pm): It is April, which means it is Autism Awareness Month and this is my annual update to the House on our family's autism journey. It has been almost three years since our son was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. At the time of diagnosis he was not speaking and that, combined with the fact that he was not socialising, did make it difficult to determine his level of assessment and therefore it was at a low level. While we were always concerned about his developmental delays, it was primarily put down to the brain injury he was born with and there was very much a wait-and-see approach.

In the past 12 months we have gone through a review, in part due to his increased communication skills—for which I am thankful—and the ability to observe him in a school social setting, but also because two years is a long time developmentally for him. We have been re-assessed and his ASD level has been increased. Now we also have ADHD officially in the mix, which means that he is eligible now for NDIS. My thoughts generally on navigating the NDIS I will leave for another time. However, I can say that, if the number of problems an English-speaking educated family of means has navigating this system is anything to go by, our vulnerable families in the community are no doubt being left behind by a system that seems to have little regard for the child in this process.

Most days we can almost forget we have our little man with his own superpower in our midst—most days, but not school days. School and the thought of school fills him with dread. Even thinking about it the night before can send him into tears. Luckily for him, when he wakes up he has no idea or concept of what day it is. For him, school is a jungle that he has difficulty navigating. Within the confines of the classroom with his teachers and his aide he can go about his tasks, but once he leaves the security of that room he floats about trying to make connections but mostly avoiding kids who target and follow him.

As a parent you just want your kids to grow up to be happy and surrounded by family and friends, to know love and friendship. To know that your child has no friends and no ability to make friends is devastating. To know that he is largely rejected by his peers just rips your heart out. He is different. He talks differently. He walks differently. But he is just a kid who wants to play. He is very tactile and he sees the world through his hands. He needs to touch things to make sure that they are real. Unfortunately, school is not an environment where you are allowed to touch everything and touch other people. We have had a few instances and there have been some suspensions. However, on a positive note I will show the House his annual self-portrait. He is now a much more colourful child, but he has retained his blond curls, which he loves. It is Autism Awareness Month but it should be known as 'Autism Acceptance Month'.