

ATAC

Action for Tasmanian Autistic Children

MEDIA RELEASE

AUTISM BECOMES AN ELECTION ISSUE

At a highly emotional and at times volatile forum at Glenorchy yesterday afternoon, families with children with autism made it clear that they were not going to put up any longer with the treatment that they and their families have been subjected to. Angry families revealed the terrible stress they live under, the impossibility of getting meaningful services for their children, and how government agencies simply did not understand their needs.

'The forum was held at Glenorchy Football Club in the Labour Government's heartland, in the state electorate of Denison,' Roger Law, Secretary of Action For Tasmanian Autistic Children [ATAC] said, 'which is also the greenest electorate in Australia. It also holds one of the largest concentrations of families with autism in the State.'

Mr Law said that many of these families, who live under intense pressure and whose needs are so high, have been Labour heartland voters all their lives. Yesterday that changed.

With a well researched and detailed policy announcement that would make Tasmania the leading Australian State in the provision of care for children with autism, Liberal Health Shadow Minister for Health, Brett Whiteley, gave hope to these families, and showed the commitment of his party which had thoroughly researched the issue, had consulted widely with the autism community and which has been actively helping autism advocates to obtain services for children affected by autism.

The Greens and Labour representatives who followed Mr Whiteley could offer no policy initiatives in the area of services to children with autism, though Greens' leader, Nick McKim, did announce that his party would be releasing further policies for families with autism later in the campaign.

In the hour of questions from the audience, families dealing with the issues of autism revealed their anger that the Labour party was not represented by a member of the Government, but instead sent a candidate for Denison, Madeleine Ogilvie, who battled

valiantly to try to get some credit for her party.

Mr Law said that the families were clearly angry at the inaction of Labour in the provision of meaningful services over twelve long years of government. They expressed a strong feeling that they had been let down by Labour, who were pouring millions of dollars to big business and horse-racing but had forgotten their roots, by ignoring the people who had put them into government.

At the close of the meeting, Labour staffer Terry McCarthy sat with a serious expression on his face texting for many minutes.

Mr Law said that in many Tasmanian electorates, families dealing with autism, as well as their extended families, would comprise three to four percent of the vote.

'Labour and the Greens need to develop policies to match those announced by Brett Whiteley,' he said. 'If the feelings in the rest of the disability sector are as strong as those expressed at yesterday's meeting, then Labour is in deep trouble.'

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