

CHILD PROTECTION — VULNERABLE CHILDREN — MERREDIN

598. Hon RICK MAZZA to the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Child Protection:

I refer to the lack of resources, including the availability of respite and temporary foster carers, for vulnerable school-age children in the regional town of Merredin.

- (1) Is the minister aware of local children, already traumatised by dysfunctional family dynamics, being sent away from their schools, teachers and friends in order to access appropriate foster care?
- (2) If yes to (1), has the impact of the removal of a child or children from their community been assessed by mental health practitioners?
- (3) Given that a concerned foster parent in Merredin has approached the Department of Communities, hoping to establish a crisis centre to cater for children requiring short-term care, has the minister given consideration to this matter?
- (4) If no to (3), can the minister confirm that the department has received any communication to that effect?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) The Department of Communities aims to keep children in their local area and maintain children's connection with family support networks and school where possible. The purpose of out-of-home care is to provide children with stable, nurturing care that enables them to heal from the trauma that they have experienced. Some children need to move to have a suitable care arrangement that meets their individual needs. The Department of Communities supports children with this transition and ensures that planning is undertaken to maintain connections with the important people in their lives. The Department of Communities funds a family group home in Merredin. This service supports children in care being able to remain in the local area.
- (2) The Department of Communities undertakes comprehensive assessments to make evidence-based decisions in the best interests of the child, which may include individualised mental health assessments.
- (3)–(4) In November 2019, a foster carer made inquiries to Communities about setting up a group home in Merredin for children in care, with specialist staff. The Department of Communities advised that a family group home was already in operation in Merredin. The Department of Communities has existing contractual arrangements with community-based service providers for the provision of family group homes across the state. These agreements are entered into following thorough and transparent procurement processes.