

EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE — TELETHON KIDS INSTITUTE AND MINDEROO FOUNDATION

**131. Ms J.M. FREEMAN to the Minister for Community Services:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to investing in early childhood services, particularly in regional and remote areas of Western Australia, and the unprecedented \$50 million early childhood initiative announced yesterday. Can the minister further outline to the house how this historic partnership with Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Kids Institute will support disadvantaged children and help communities in delivering childhood development services?

**Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

I am very pleased to stand on behalf of the McGowan government as it is part of the collaboration that is the early years initiative, which builds on the understanding that so much development occurs from conception to four years old. Enormous cognitive, physical and emotional development occurs in those early years from zero to four, so much so that international researchers are still in awe of the development and the influence that we can have if we invest in those early years.

The partnership is for \$49.3 million and it is, as I said, a significant partnership, building on the commitment of Minderoo Foundation, headed by Nicola Forrest, and the Telethon Kids Institute, which will provide its significant world-class research expertise to the effort. Significantly, it is a 10-year project. That is also an element of this exercise of which we are very pleased to be a part, because it is very tempting for governments to look at short-term projects and not projects that invest over the long haul. Long-term projects are needed if we want to invest in the communities, families and individuals who really need the most attention. We will work on four sites—one in the metropolitan area, one in a regional centre and two in remote areas. As I said, the structure in place will build on the partnerships between the state government and all its agencies, the philanthropic efforts of Minderoo Foundation and the research capacity of the Telethon Kids Institute. The investment in early years through this initiative is in stark contrast to the previous government's attitude to the early years. In its last two years of government, it cut \$10 million from parenting services.

**Mrs L.M. Harvey** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Scarborough!

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** That included cuts to support for Aboriginal children aged zero to three years. The previous government cut those services. The Barnett government cut that support for some of the most vulnerable children in our state. In contrast, we are building a partnership, as I said. We know that it will be not only government that resolves some of the entrenched disadvantage in communities. It will not be only the not-for-profits. It will not be only the communities. It will be all of us working together. We want to make sure that the communities, through either local government or their own organisations, are involved in designing the initiatives that we will then put in place in their community. We will measure how we are going with those initiatives with the assistance of TKI.

The early years initiative builds on some of the themes of this government. The government has to have a joint approach. We have to be a lot more effective working across government agencies. We have manifested that in the machinery-of-government changes. We have to work in partnerships with research bodies, community organisations and philanthropic efforts. We have to work on early intervention if we want to turn around disadvantage and we have to look at an evidence-based approach. I am confident that if we have the right support for the disadvantaged kids, families and communities, we can turn around their disadvantage and those communities and their children can thrive.