



ACTION FOR TASMANIAN AUTISTIC CHILDREN Celebrate the difference!

March - 2014 Special Election Edition 3

THIS IS THE THIRD OF A NUMBER OF SPECIAL NEWSLETTERS ATAC WILL PUBLISH IN THE LEAD UP TO THE 2014 MARCH STATE ELECTIONS. IN THESE SPECIAL NEWSLETTERS WE WILL ANALYSE AND COMMENT UPON THE POLICIES OF EACH POLITICAL PARTY.

WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED RELEVANT STATEMENTS FROM THE TASMANIAN LABOR PARTY AND THE GREENS AND IN THIS ISSUE WE WILL CRITICALLY ANALYSE THE COMMITMENTS GIVEN .

STATE WIDE MEETINGS

The first two of these meetings have been held in Launceston and Burnie.

WE URGE ALL THOSE WHO ARE TOUCHED BY AUTISM AND WISH TO SEE POSITIVE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT AUTISM POLICY TO ATTEND THE FINAL OF THIS SERIES OF MEETINGS TO BE HELD AS FOLLOWS

Glenorchy

Date: Wednesday 5 March 2014

Time: 6.45pm for 7.00pm- 8.30pm

Venue: Tattersalls Park Function Centre
6 Goodwood Road

THE THREE MAJOR PARTIES HAVE BEEN INVITED TO ATTEND TO DISCUSS THEIR AUTISM POLICIES.

THERE WILL BE TIME FOR QUESTIONS TO BE DIRECTED FROM THE FLOOR TO THE PARTY REPRESENTATIVES.

POLICY ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GREENS

[Click here to read *Action for Tasmanians with Autism, Developing an Autism State Plan*, 24 February 2014](#)

Please note: ATAC is in no way associated with the Green's policy, even though the heading of this document may suggest such an association.

When we remove the 'motherhood' statements about autism, the Green Policy amounts to **two initiatives** dealing with the needs of **people with autism**.

The Greens' 10 Year State Autism Plan and Implementation Policy

Two senior Green members held the two most important portfolios that cover the areas of those with autism in the ALP-Green cabinet. In the period that they have held these critical positions as Ministers for Education and Disability Services, apparently there has been **no** plan developed or implemented to cover the largest group of disabled children in Tasmania.

However, we will examine this document as a serious proposal.

- There is a failure in this policy to have any research conducted into the number of with people with autism in Tasmania. How can any plan be effective if this is not done? This failure indicates that the Green Party has done no work on the latest research findings.

Throughout the world, governments that have done their homework are moving to implement intensive interventions as early as possible (before 2 years of age) as research has discovered this is the period in which the brain is at its most plastic. Beyond this point, autism can be hard-wired into the brain as the neurons are stripped. All previous

governments, including the Labor/Green Government, have ignored this research, consequently they have failed to provide services based on research. There is nothing in this document which indicates that the '10 Year Autism Plan' will be based on scientific evidence.

The problem we see in Tasmania is that all Government bodies have completely ignored the evidence that autism research has produced in recent years. The result is that we have no up to date scientific treatments for autism in our public service institutions.

Research into and knowledge of autism is developing so fast now that any policies drawn up without being based on the changes in our knowledge will be outdated before they are implemented.

The Liberal Party has, on the otherhand, not only recognised this fact, but has proposed an ongoing expert committee to adjust policy as research findings come in.

The Greens autism policy has been hastily cobbled together as they become aware that autism is a major election issue.

The second proposal put forward by the Greens is to channel finance into one of the support groups for autism in Tasmania.

- ATAC can only believe that this is an attempt to cause tensions among the autism support organisations. This will not succeed. All the autism support organisations are fully aware that there has been NO such proposal made by them or to them on this matter.
- **A PROPOSAL OF THIS NATURE RAISES SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROPRIETY OF THE GREENS. If they were to carry out such a proposal, then surely the proper process would be to advertise and ask for tenders. The other alternative would be for a support organisation to apply for a grant which would be examined using the normal processes. It would appear that the Green Party has become infected by the problem processes of their coalition**

partners and are prepared to channel money for political purposes without proper and transparent process. Perhaps this matter should be referred to the Integrity Commission.

NOW WE TURN TO THE ALP POLICY

We received the response of the ALP on February 25th, after the Burnie meeting had been held.

[Click here](#) *Letter from the Premier*, 25 February, 2014

The Premier's response on behalf of her party is a more honest response than that of the Greens.

The Labor Party is basically standing on its record, and offers no new State initiatives.

- The first area the Premier details is the Tasmanian Autistic Diagnostic Assessment Service (TASDAS). ATAC acknowledges the professionalism of TASDAS, and has received no complaints concerning this aspect of its operations. However, we have grave concerns about the waiting lists and the length of time it takes for a child to be able to access this service.

TASDAS was formed in 2009, approximately 5 years ago. For the last 20 years the numbers of children with autism have been consistently doubling every 5 years. This means that the staff required to provide initial service delivery should have been also doubled to meet the increased demand.

When there is no research on the prevalence rates of autism, then adequate services cannot be planned for and implemented.

- The Premier's letter went on to say 'people with autism are eligible to access services through the specialist disability service system. Last year 479 clients with a primary disability type of autism accessed specialist disability services.' The Premier has not, however, done the necessary research on prevalence rates. The best approximation that ATAC can make is that, given the number of children born in Tasmania each year, there

are 300 of these children who will be later diagnosed with autism. Once again this failure to do the required research means that many people are missing out on these services simply because the funding is inadequate for the numbers of children coming through.

- When discussing education for children with autism, the Premier states ‘We do not have a separate policy for children with autism spectrum disorder just as we do not have a separate policy for children with Down’s Syndrome, vision or hearing impairment, or any other disability.’

The Premier clearly does not understand that autistic people DO NOT LEARN in the same manner as other children. If they did, they would not be autistic. Therefore an Education Policy that treats autistic children IN THE SAME WAY as all other children means that they cannot learn in our schools. This is the reason that so few autistic children in Tasmania go onto higher education and employment.

SUMMING UP ATAC’S POSITION ON THE AUTISM POLICIES OF EACH OF THE 3 MAJOR PARTIES IN THE UPCOMING ELECTION

Autism research indicates that early intensive intervention programmes for autism are at **their most effective in the first two years of life**. This is the reason that world wide research is concentrating on lowering the age at which autism diagnosis takes place.

Of the three policies only that of the Tasmanian Liberal Party acknowledges this fact, and has a policy to obtain early diagnosis for autistic children.

Again the latest evidence is that it is vitally important that the co-morbidities of autism are diagnosed and treated alongside autism itself. The Liberal Party is the only party promising clinics to treat these co-morbidities.

Vitally, Liberal Party policy will introduce the *Rethink* programme which is designed to give every autistic student an individual programme based on their individual, and **different,**

learning styles. This ensures that every autistic child can reach their full potential, with many able to go on to higher education and gainful employment.

[Click here to read *Tasmanian Liberals. Improving Support for Students with a Disability*](#), Liberal Party Policy Statement 2014

ATAC believes that the policy enunciated by the Tasmanian Liberal Party is based on the findings of dynamic and on-going autism research.

Clearly the Liberal Party has been following the advances that have been made in the diagnosis and treatment of autism, and with their expert panel will be able to make on-going adjustments to their policy as more research emerges.

The other two major parties do not have policies that reflect the latest scientific research. Subsequently, they have no clear plan to tackle the enormous problem that their neglect of scientific fact in this area has created for this state. Their legacy is leading to a chronic breakdown in the care of people with autism in Tasmania.

We would remind our readers that four years ago, prior to the last elections in 2010, the Greens announced a policy that gave

“ ... in-principle support for the use of best-practice ABA in early intervention programmes for children with autism.”

and that announced a

“package (in which) ... is a commitment of \$3m over three years (funding four FTEs) to establish two Autism Spectrum Disorder Clinics based at the Royal Hobart and Launceston General Hospitals with an additional capacity to cover the North West of Tasmania through dedicated space at the North West Regional Hospital.”

[Click here *Letter from Greens’ Candidate Cassy O’Connor \(later Minister for Disabilities in Labor Green Government\)*](#)

We would remind you that when these policies were moved by Jacquie Petrusma, the Shadow Minister, in an attempt to obtain at least some improvement for people with autism, the 5 Greens voted as a block against their own policy.

Furthermore, they have now dropped all their previous **progressive** policies for a nebulous commitment to *develop* a 10 year plan.

Labor Party Policy is at least consistent.

They stand by their lack of services, and support an antiquated and third world policy which leaves autistic people in this State with totally inadequate services that reflect nothing of the radical changes in autism research and treatment elsewhere in the world.

IF YOU BELIEVE THERE IS A NEED FOR CHANGE IN THE PROVISION OF SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM IN TASMANIA AT ALL LEVELS, THEN THERE IS ONLY ONE PARTY IN THIS STATE THAT OFFERS A POLICY BASED ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH, AND COMMITS TO INTRODUCE PROGRAMMES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF AUTISTIC PEOPLE.

YOU MAY NOT AGREE WITH OTHER POLICIES OF THE TASMANIAN LIBERALS, BUT WE SUGGEST THAT THE NEEDS OF OUR CHILDREN ARE SO GREAT THAT THEY MUST TAKE PRIORITY IN THESE ELECTIONS.



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1 March 2014**

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