



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Securing the Care Seminar

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services) (9.40 a.m.), by leave: On 31 May of this year, the Forde commission of inquiry into the abuse of children in Queensland institutions presented the report of its findings and recommendations. Whilst the commission concluded that significant numbers of children have suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse in State institutions, it also acknowledged a number of new services and programs were being developed at the time of the review to tackle those problems. One of the most significant of these was the Securing the Care project, designed to improve the coordination of services, case planning and the management of young people in detention.

At 1.30 p.m. today, I have the pleasure of officially opening a seminar about the Securing the Care project and its implementation across Queensland's three youth detention centres. The seminar will be attended by representatives from key community and youth organisations, Government departments and academic institutions as well as senior youth justice administrators from all Australian States and Territories. During the seminar, an information paper and three research reports produced during the course of the project will be publicly released.

The Securing the Care project was started in May 1998 by Queensland Corrections to critically examine the range of processes encountered by young people during their periods of detention. These included the systems used to make decisions about matters such as young people's case plans, their behaviour management, management of their suicide risk and security classification amongst others. The Department of Families, Youth and Community Care continued and built upon this work and in March of this year initiated a six-month plan for implementing the project's findings across all centres. Key outcomes of the project have included—

- a single framework for practice entitled the Secure the Care Framework to guide the work of all occupational groups working in centres be they case workers, youth workers, nurses or teachers;
- new organisational arrangements through the creation of Secure the Care panels within each centre to better coordinate and integrate the work of these staff;

- new assessment procedures, information systems and forms to support the improved practices;
- increased opportunities for young people to responsibly participate in decisions that affect their lives; and

- higher levels of accountability and transparency led by the creation of secure care review groups made up of community-based youth and indigenous agencies and the Victims of Crime Association that will monitor the performance of the detention centres.

A key component of the Securing the Care research involved a survey of 84 detained young people who volunteered to participate in the project. Let us be very clear. Young people who offend should be held accountable for their actions. The community has a right to expect that, when young people are sentenced to detention, security will be maintained to prevent their escape. The community also has a right, however, to expect that, when young people are detained, this will be done safely, taking into account their age and maturity, and that young people will not leave detention more criminalised than when they were admitted.

The community has every right to expect that services will be provided to assist these young people to rehabilitate and avoid growing into adult offenders, thereby securing the long-term protection of the community from crime. It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to listen very carefully to young people, to understand what happens to them in detention, to improve their rehabilitation and successful reintegration into the community.

While young people had some criticisms to make of detention centres, these were generally made fairly, with many also commenting positively about their experiences and the efforts of staff. Of particular interest was the insight that young people showed about the dilemmas that are faced on an almost daily basis by managers and staff in balancing the purposes of detention. It is this pursuit of a balanced approach to detention that best summarises Securing the Care.

Securing the Care has become much more than a series of administrative processes and forms. It has become a culture—a mind-set for all who work with young people in detention. Securing the Care is about ensuring that young people are dealt with firmly, fairly and safely whilst in detention. It is about providing them with the guidance and services to keep them safe and maximise their opportunities to avoid further offending.

Implementation of the project represents a milestone in the Government's progress in acting on the recommendations of the Forde inquiry. Along with plans for the construction of a new Brisbane centre, a rebuilding of the Cleveland centre at Townsville, an upgrading of the John Oxley Centre and the closure of the Sir Leslie Wilson Centre, Securing the Care heralds a new era in youth justice services in this State.
