



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 4 April 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Foster Carers

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10.02 a.m.), by leave: Foster families provide an extraordinary service. They provide love, guidance and comfort to children and young people who often have very challenging and difficult behaviours or disabilities. Many of our 1,269 foster families have been involved for a number of years, and recently I had the privilege of meeting some of our foster families at the 2001 Foster Care Excellence Awards. The achievements and qualities of the special people receiving awards this year reflect the commitment of carers. Most have children of their own, yet are also able to meet the special needs of their foster children. Some are caring for indigenous children with special needs, and all have successfully cared for children with very challenging behaviours.

I want to take this opportunity to quickly draw attention to some exceptional families. Linda and Gary Creedy and family, from the Ipswich and Logan region, have been carers for over 20 years. Their dedication to the children in their care—whether it be pre-adoption, emergency care, short term or long term—has always been with the children's best interests in mind and with the objective of their safe return to their own family.

Carmel and Steve Osborne from the Caboolture and Redcliffe peninsula have been foster carers for 35 years. They have cared for well over 300 children during that time. These children have stayed for varying periods of time, some right through to independence and beyond, but all remain a part of Carmel and Steve's family.

Jackie Pallister from Brisbane has been a foster carer to numerous children over a 20-year period. Jackie has been caring for a sibling group of three children who have been in long-term care with Jackie for five years and have recently been successfully reunited with their natural father.

It is something that is done voluntarily, and it is probably one of the largest volunteer efforts across the state that often goes unrecognised. Having said that—like any tough job, it is not easy to recruit people, and it is not easy to retain them. The number of foster families has remained stable over the past five years. However, the number of children entering the foster care system increases by approximately 4 per cent each year. We are always looking for new foster carers. Anyone with a strong commitment to helping others can apply to become a foster carer.

One of my main objectives is to ensure that this ongoing dedication from foster carers is matched by the department in its support for these carers. We will do this by building on the achievements made throughout 2000. The improvement in the financial support of foster carers is an immediate goal. We will be delivering a 10 per cent increase in the foster carers allowance this year, building on the 4 per cent increase last year. This year, we will also see a doubling in the frequency of the outfitting allowance. This improvement will ensure that an allowance will be provided during every school year and an additional payment available for the year prior to school.

Without such dedicated foster carers, the job of trying to meet the needs of these children would be literally impossible. They perform a magnificent service throughout the state and deserve our continued support.
