



Speech by

**DESLEY SCOTT**

**MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE**

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### **CHILD CARE BILL**

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (6.23 p.m.): I am very happy to be able to take part in this debate on the Child Care Bill 2002 today. When asked what my interests and passions are, parenting and child care are always high on my list. If children are to grow into healthy, well-balanced adults, it is imperative that parents have adequate parenting skills and also that child care options are flexible and offer not only adequate, affordable care but also that staff are well trained and are able to respond to the needs of their young charges.

This government places a high value on supporting the needs of families while providing high-quality care and education for children. Child care enables parents to work, study or seek employment, or maybe carry out work in their community or fulfil other family responsibilities. Child care is also able to give a mum who is finding it hard to cope some hours to rejuvenate and perhaps to interact socially, which can be so important to release stress.

I am particularly impressed that embodied in this bill are wider considerations incorporated in the Beattie government's Queensland Strategic Plan for Child Care 2000-2005, the first key result area being 'Child care—improving Queensland's standard of living'. This strategy looks at the relationship of child care to regional, economic and industrial planning, ensuring that employers and the child care industry are better informed about the child care needs of employees, industry-employer needs, child care programs and family-friendly policies and practices. It also looks to ensure that appropriate and affordable child care is available to unemployed parents and that support services and information for families with young children are accessible from child care services.

Our society can be very isolating, and I believe that many young mothers suffer from a lack of information about services and support networks. Our government has worked towards these outcomes in a number of ways, including the operation of the child care information service; the Triple P—the Positive Parenting Program; and the SmartLicence service, the child care business licensing information package titled *Your guide to starting a child-care business in Queensland*.

The child care information service is a free statewide service provided by the Department of Families. It operates from 8.30 to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday and provides information to assist families in choosing child care that best meets their needs, such as the types of services available, location, hours of operation, and contact details for services. It also outlines the features of a quality service and developing new child care services. Publications and information sheets are also available along with a brochure outlining the role of the information service.

From July 2001 to June 2002, this service responded to almost 11,000 telephone inquiries, averaging 44 calls per day; 170,994 publications were distributed to parents, developers and students either by mail or at displays at community events or expos; and the Department of Families' child care web pages recorded 95,277 hits. These statistics are testament to the high community need and the high level of service delivery by our department in this area.

On a number of occasions I have spoken in this place about the necessity for parenting education and support and the great results that we see from the Triple P program. Queensland Health is to be commended for this free program that is offered to parents and carers right across Queensland.

Triple P is a multilevel family intervention program for the prevention and treatment of behavioural and emotional problems in children aged 18 months to eight years of age. The program was developed by Parenting and Family Support of the University of Queensland and is aimed at promoting parents' knowledge, skills and confidence and their ability to promote the development, growth, health and social competency of children. Trained and accredited child health staff work with parents individually and in groups to impart skills which will help parents to recognise and respond to common behavioural problems and to assist in building positive relationships with their children.

Twenty early intervention child psychologist social workers have also been employed to implement level 5 Triple P, which aims to equip parents to better manage severe emotional and behavioural problems in children. The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services funded child care resource workers who are able to assist in locating suitable child care and in some instances financial assistance in local communities for parents and carers attending the Triple P program. Options include centre based long day care, family day care, out-of-school-hours care and occasional care. I am always an enthusiastic advocate for parents accessing all the information and education available. I am delighted to inform the House that both Woodridge and Mabel Park high schools encourage young mothers to continue their education and have wonderful programs both to encourage the continuation of their study program and to give a caring network of support and to instruct in parenting skills. A child care network has been established at both of these schools and the programs are running well.

The Department of State Development's SmartLicence is an innovative program that provides a simple one-stop shop for businesses that need information and assistance from government. It provides free business licensing information packages, thus simplifying the process for people intending to start a business. Intending businesses are able to access a package called *Your guide to starting a child-care business in Queensland*, which was developed in conjunction with the Department of Families. The package has been designed to assist in the decision-making process with application forms and guidelines. It gives an overview of time frames, costs and relevant contacts and can be downloaded from the Department of State Development's web site. This legislation was developed in consultation with many working parents, including those who work non-standard hours and often experience difficulty accessing services for their children.

Parents identified a need to improve integration of child care, kindergarten and preschool services and in particular the need to access these in one setting. The provision of extended hours of child care was a high priority. This bill seeks to introduce flexibility into the service delivery. The increasing number of families with dependent children where both parents are in the work force has highlighted the need for new models of child care and family support that can better respond to the changing needs of families. The child care and families support hub strategy that is an innovative initiative of this government responds to the express needs of parents for improved access to a range of services that include child care. Essentially, a child care and family support hub is a grouping of services that meet the needs of children and families. These hubs focus on the provision of child care and early childhood services and may also include family support services, parenting support, child health services and education services. Access to these services is provided through a single entry point. A hub may operate from a central location, local network or a central point of coordination.

Since the announcement of the child care and family support hub strategy under the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan in 1999, a great deal of interest has been generated in the integrated delivery care and family support services throughout the state. The initial funding round in 2000-01 provided approximately \$1 million to 14 services located in Julatten, Stanthorpe, Redlands, Caboolture, Bracken Ridge, Coen, Pormpuraaw, Maryborough, Tara, Injune, Mount Morgan, Tamborine, Kingston East and Townsville. I would here like to commend the wonderful support network at Kingston East neighbourhood centre, where they care for almost any need of families and individuals in the wider Kingston, Woodridge and Slacks Creek areas. For many years I have referred constituents to this centre for housing, emergency relief, counselling and support. All have been treated with the greatest respect, and many people owe a debt of gratitude to the caring workers and volunteers at this centre.

To return to the hub strategy, an action research project has been undertaken with these services which documents the development and establishment of services and the outcomes that have been achieved for children and families. Research reports are now available on the department's web site, which is [www.families.qld.gov.au/childcare](http://www.families.qld.gov.au/childcare). The Queensland government's election commitment in 2001 to provide funding of \$500,000 for the establishment of a further six child care and family support hubs further strengthens its commitment to provide quality child care services to support Queensland families. That election promise has been met through the approval of \$561,160 of triennial funding and \$304,372 of capital funding. Another 10 hubs are now being established in Robina, Mount Isa, Gympie, Thuringowa, Upper Ross (Townsville), Ipswich West, Beaudesert, Burnett, Stretton and Indooroopilly. In addition to these, two other support hubs have been developed in Doomadgee and Aurukun to support the needs of the families in these communities.

The hub in Aurukun is being progressed as a Department of Families strategy under the Cape York partnership. Other innovative initiatives are the mobile services that have been developed to respond to families' diverse needs. The Longreach and District Mobile Service has been funded by the Department of Families and is based at the Longreach multifunctional centre, which was established using funding under the Rural Children's Centres program. This centre incorporates a 47 place child-care centre and was opened in January 1999. The service also provides family day care and in-home care in the district. Western Queensland families can now enjoy a new innovative form of child care. An existing mobile child care service has been extended, with two staff resourcing venues in Aramac, Muttaborra, Ilfracombe and Isisford by offering limited hours child care one day per week. This service gives parents the opportunity to attend cattle sales, do mustering, attend appointments, shop, participate in work shops, work part time, help their other children with distance education or just have a break. Mobile child care services provide flexible, responsive and innovative services to children and families in isolated or disadvantaged communities in rural, urban and remote areas.

I must say that my great-great-grandmother, Caroline Plumb, would have longed for such a service. She arrived from England with her husband and family in 1870 on board the *Suffolk* and they decided to settle in Longreach. More children were born, making a grand total of eight young mouths to feed. It was at this time that my great-great-grandfather died, leaving Caroline a widow to raise her large family. She is registered in the Stockman's Hall of Fame as one of the unsung heroes, and I can well imagine her efforts were quite worthy of that honour. I would love to hear some of those personal stories.

Having visited many of our delightful outback towns as a member of the Hon. Tony McGrady's committee, I must applaud our government for extending these services to families of the outback. This is true equality. Mobile child care services provide flexible, responsive and innovative services to children and families in isolated or disadvantaged communities in rural, urban and remote areas. The Queensland government is committed to an overall aim of the provision of child care services to all Queenslanders regardless of their geographical location. In particular, this government is committed to the provision of innovative early childhood and support services to children and families living in rural, remote and isolated locations all throughout Queensland.

For example, Uniting Church Frontier Services is funded by the Department of Families to provide two mobile outreach services that are located at Mareeba and Emerald. As a highly regarded and valuable child care service for families in remote areas of Queensland, these mobile services provide early childhood activities, support and advice to parents and practical resources to families in remote communities and on isolated properties. Through initiatives such as the child care and family support hub strategy, mobile services and the development of this new regulatory framework, the Queensland government has made a strong commitment to strengthening and sustaining family and community life in Queensland. I thank the minister for her commitment to families in our state and those responsible for developing this legislation. This bill is a critical element of this commitment. I commend it to the House.