



Speech by

**JAN JARRATT**

**MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY**

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Hansard 9 April 2002

**NATIONAL FOSTER CARE DAY**

**Ms JARRATT** (Whitsunday—ALP) (7.29 p.m.): In a perfect world, all children would be loved and nurtured, would have ample food and shelter, would be intellectually and physically stimulated and motivated, and would have an unerring sense of security and belonging. Sadly, this is not the case for some children and young people in our society. For a whole variety of reasons, some parents are not able or equipped to provide these basic needs for their children. Even more disturbingly, some parents are not able to protect their children from a situation in which they experience neglect or abuse.

It is not our role to judge these people. Rather, we should and do provide support so that they can put their lives back on track. However, it is our role to provide protection for children who suffer abuse and to provide a home for those who need care. Very often the people providing an alternative home and family life for these children are foster carers—ordinary men and women who provide an extraordinary service in our communities.

The work of these remarkable people has been recognised this year through National Foster Care Day. On 24 March people across the nation came together to celebrate the enormous contribution made by foster carers towards the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in need of care and protection. The day provided an opportunity to say thank you for doing a very important job that for too long has gone unheralded.

I was fortunate to be invited to attend the Mackay-Whitsunday Foster Care Day celebrations, which were held at Queens Beach in Bowen. It was a wonderful day with foster carers, their children and community members coming together to share lunch, some excellent entertainment and to reflect on the ups and downs in providing foster care for children and young people in need. Indeed, one family travelled from Mackay—some 200 kilometres—to participate in the celebrations.

Speakers on the day included James Gaston, an elder of the Girru Dala community, who provided a welcome to country, and councillor Rod Mackney. Rod was full of praise for local foster care providers and gave recognition to the important role they play in the Bowen community.

The Mackay/Whitsunday Regional Director of Families, Michael Bishop, spoke about the determination of his department to support foster carers through a range of structures and facilities. These initiatives include a collaborative research partnership that has been set up with James Cook University to examine issues relating to foster care and to provide a forum for discussion and consultation, resulting in the recognition of needs and a proactive response opportunity.

One person who could not be with us on the day in Bowen was local foster parent Annette Power, but this was for a very good reason. Annette was in Brisbane, where she was honoured for her dedicated contribution to children in care through the presentation of one of nineteen 2002 Queensland Foster Care Excellence Awards. I congratulate Annette on receiving this award.

National Foster Care Day gave me the opportunity to say thank you to the generous people in my region who, through sharing their homes and lives with children and young people in need, help to nurture our most precious resource—our children. I repeat that expression of appreciation here tonight by putting on record my deep respect and gratitude to foster carers everywhere.

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