



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 8 October 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (9.52 a.m.): Staff from the Department of Families work each day, often in a highly volatile and sometimes hostile environment. The difficulty and complexity of the work was recognised by the Ombudsman in his latest report. For those of you who believe that the issues confronting us in Queensland are unique, let me quote from Lord Laming from the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report, United Kingdom—

Whenever a child is deliberately injured or killed there is inevitably great concern in case some important tell-tale sign has been missed. Those who sit in judgement often do so with the great benefit of hindsight.

Unfortunately, rarely do we hear about the extent of their work. We do not see on the front page the stories of the children saved; the family that is functioning more effectively because of early intervention or the young lives that are turned around because counselling and intervention kept them from the criminal justice system. But that is the work our workers do each and every day. They see aspects of human nature which many of us could not imagine. They see the consequences of human behaviour that simply defies description.

Let us have a look at the other side of the ledger, the contribution that these workers make. For instance, in the twelve months from July 1 last year child protection workers made 2,892 court appearances on child protection issues and appeared in 8,384 youth justice matters. They are dealing with a total of 31,068 child protection notifications this year, and I would point out that the cases notified have been increasing since 1996-97, and to some extent this is an indication that people have confidence in the system. In fact, the number of notifications of suspected child abuse and neglect has increased by 42 per cent across Australia. As experienced child protection workers will tell you, the complexity and the difficulty of the cases has also dramatically increased. They are supporting 1,113 foster carers. They support 1,682 young people under child protection orders and work with 262 non-government child protection and family support services.

We do not live in a perfect world. We need to face up to these statistics. We do not often hear from children whose lives have been improved because of intervention from the state. This government acknowledges the need to tackle the problems and make the necessary changes to our child protection system. We do not walk away from reports from the Ombudsman, the CMC or any independent audit or inquiry but we also do need to acknowledge that people like our family service officers and our foster carers are making a positive difference to the lives of thousands of vulnerable children every day.