



Speech by

Hon. K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

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FOSTER CARE

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (11.53 a.m.): I am receiving more and more representations where young people are being placed in foster care without their relatives, especially their grandparents or their aunties, being advised that these children are in foster care. Most of the representations are coming from the grandparents themselves who have not been advised that their grandchildren have been placed in foster care. When they suddenly realise, they want to look after their grandchildren in a guardianship situation.

I have just been advised of one such case in Mount Tamborine. These grandparents have a 39-year-old daughter who has twin 12-year-old children. These young children had come to the grandparents quite often and these grandparents knew that their 39-year-old daughter had problems with drugs. When these grandparents were contacted by one of the 12-year-old children to say that they had been in foster care for three weeks, they were in shock. They drove to Innisfail to try to make contact with the children. It is very difficult, especially when children have been in foster care for three or four weeks, for grandparents to turn up; it is difficult for the foster-parents and it is difficult for the grandparents. Sometimes those young children are happy in their foster care arrangement and do not want to have access to the grandparents. It is a very sad situation.

What I find is that the Department of Families is moving more and more to placing children in foster care and then if grandparents wish to have the children these children are brought into the care of the grandparents but they do not receive the same finance which people in a foster care situation have access to. This is all right if the grandparents are in a very good financial situation and are prepared to look after the children and can look after the children not only for that specific period but for the period until maybe the mother comes out of drug rehabilitation or maybe in some situations for the rest of their lives.

But if these grandparents are not in a very good financial situation no foster care money is being paid to the grandparents because it is the grandparents who have asked for guardianship. If initially the Department of Families approached the grandparents and asked them to take the children, then it would be a foster care situation. So we find the Department of Families clearly has adopted a policy where it is placing children in foster care without initially advising the grandparents or advising relatives of what has happened and what is happening in that long-term situation. The grandparents obviously have a difficulty in looking after their 39-year-old daughter and getting her out of drug rehabilitation without the problem of having grandchildren in a foster care situation and being unable to access them.

I have my concerns that the Department of Families is moving more and more into the area of foster care and taking it away from the community care area. Something the coalition did a long time ago was to try to strengthen the community care area. We had concerns about the Department of Families acting wholly within the area of foster care. I believe with the hours that are needed in foster care it is impossible for the Department of Families to take over completely the area of foster care. A lot of foster care happens late at night and in the early hours of the morning, and we cannot expect public servants to be available all of the time.

There is no doubt that some control by the Department of Families is necessary, but it is necessary for the areas of community care to come very strongly into the area of foster care and to set up arrangements where young children are assessed initially and then placed correctly into foster care arrangements which are suitable for that child. I believe if we bring it back too far into the Department of Families this does not occur. Areas like crisis care come into operation, but crisis care is not perfect. That is necessary for people of Aboriginal descent, but the Department of Families sometimes does not have enough access. I believe it is necessary for the Department of Families to hand over most of the foster care arrangements to community care groups. These community care groups will have a concern for proper assessment, but initially when the child is taken into foster care, for whatever arrangements, the grandparents and relatives are to be contacted before there is a formal placement into foster care.