



Speech by

Hon. MIKE REYNOLDS

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard 29 April 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

Hon. M. F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.00 a.m.): At noon today my department and I will be launching a major nationwide campaign here at state parliament to recruit an additional 518 specialised child safety staff over the next three years. We hope to employ up to 318 of those people in the next financial year. The new employees will be deployed in various locations across Queensland, with many staffing the 46 child safety service centres that will replace the 36 area offices.

This is a significant part of the Beattie government's commitment to safeguarding Queensland children and reflects Peter Forster's blueprint to implement the CMC's 110 recommendations to reform child protection in Queensland. It is central to our efforts to create an entirely new department with a new positive workplace culture that has a very clear child protection focus.

We are looking for dedicated child protection professionals with a degree in social work or behavioural sciences, and people experienced in working with families who can help people in support roles. There will be an increased emphasis on local recruitment of paraprofessional staff, called child safety support officers, to assist degree-qualified child safety officers. A major focus will be on the recruitment of indigenous staff which will ensure that the work force is more responsive and representative of our diverse clients. Another key focus is the development of a diversity policy which ensures that staff of the Department of Child Safety represent the multicultural society which we serve, and I look forward to working with Karen Struthers, the parliamentary secretary to the Premier on multicultural affairs, with regard to that focus.

This recruitment campaign is unprecedented in the area of child protection in Queensland and is being brought about in part by the massive injection of more than \$200 million in additional recurrent funds by the 2006-07 financial year. The additional staff will result in more manageable caseloads, improved professional supervision and new practice standards to ensure a higher-quality service delivery to clients.

Child safety officers will have comprehensive entry-level preservice training, induction, workplace assessment, and, importantly, access to ongoing training and professional development at more advanced and refresher levels. There will be enhanced support for service delivery workers, including mentoring, stress management and emotional support, and enhanced conditions of employment, particularly in rural and remote areas. A range of incentives will encourage staff to remain in service delivery roles, particularly in rural and remote locations.

The new system we are building will not only give better protection to our most vulnerable children in Queensland; it will also give them better social development and educational opportunities and vocational outcomes. This is the future we are building, the vision we are turning into reality, and these changes for the better are largely dependent on the response and support we get to the recruitment campaign we are launching here at Parliament House today.