



Speech by

Hon. Mike Reynolds

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Wednesday, 19 May 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Children of Parents with a Mental Illness

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.11 a.m.): I want to assure the House that my new Department of Child Safety will work to ensure that the protective needs of children whose parents have a mental illness are recognised and met at the earliest possible time. It is imperative that evaluations of the health of children are incorporated in case management plans for parents with mental health problems.

Parental mental illness has been shown to be a common contributing factor not only for children being taken into care but also for those children remaining in care for protracted periods. Late intervention to protect children with mentally ill parents is rightly seen as a system failure, and we will be working hard to improve outcomes in such cases. We must be mindful at all times of the wider impacts of mental illness.

In terms of the department working with parents with a mental illness, we will continue to work towards increased collaborative, coordinated and responsive service delivery in relation to the very important linkages between parental mental health and child protection.

Where existing practice and policy does not appear to effectively address the interrelationship between parental mental illness and child protection issues, we will review this. The department will continue to pursue improved responses through cross-department information sharing and, where necessary, legislative change.

The Department of Child Safety will be the lead agency for child protection and will be supported in this role by the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Health and Education Queensland, particularly through a rejuvenated SCAN system. The enhanced suspected child abuse and neglect teams will provide an integrated across-government response to child protection. The Queensland government is committed to ensuring that all children and young people who have been harmed or who are at risk of harm have access to holistic, integrated, transparent and accountable service responses across government agencies.

On Monday I assured attendees at a social work conference at the Gold Coast Hospital that social workers who join the new Department of Child Safety can and will make a difference—a difference to the lives of the families they work with. I say to all members of the Gold Coast in the House today that the 100 or so social workers and allied health professionals I spoke with on Monday afternoon at the hospital can be assured that they have a team of dedicated and committed professionals working with my department on this very important issue.

I look forward to the positive working relationship with Queensland Health and other agencies in establishing an integrated child protection delivery system. Case planning and case management across agencies will ensure that the best outcomes are delivered for parents with mental health problems and particularly for children in that family.