



Speech by

Hon. Mike Reynolds

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Thursday, 30 September 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection Support Services

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.10 a.m.): Last week more than 1,000 child protection experts from 65 countries descended on Brisbane for the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect's 15th international congress. It was an incredible success with a wide range of information shared and friendships formed. I am very proud to be able to say that a number of staff from my Department of Child Safety presented papers at the congress on research they are undertaking as part of the reforms to the child protection system in Queensland. Being invited to share our local research findings with an international delegation of child protection experts reinforces the high standard and quality of research being conducted by child protection professionals in Queensland. One of these papers outlined the results of a Queensland study into vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue in child safety workers, an area in which I am particularly eager to address as Minister for Child Safety. The presentation identified strategies and resources to help workers experiencing vicarious trauma. It resulted from research by Matthew Armstrong, Jude Harrison, Anita Thomas and Neville Eckersley from my department.

As everyone would be aware, enduring vicarious trauma is inevitable in child protection work. In the child protection field, workers empathise with vulnerable children and families every day of their working lives in order to fully understand the context of their situation. It is personally satisfying to make a difference in people's lives—sometimes at the worst time in their lives—but to be effective in providing support to someone who has experienced trauma or abuse child protection workers are often emotionally affected by the experiences of the people they are supporting. The research indicates that specific strategies can be applied to manage the ways in which workers respond to vicarious trauma and improve the emotional health of all people working in child protection environments.

The Department of Child Safety is implementing a range of measures to safeguard the emotional health of all of our staff. An integrated support program is being implemented that includes education in self-care and emotional wellbeing, an extensive network of trained peer support officers to provide counselling, an intervention model that supports personnel following critical incidents, and specialised external counsellors for indigenous officers. My director-general, Robin Sullivan, launched the first peer support program for child protection workers recently, with 80 staff expected to complete the course by November. Paul Scully, who created the successful Queensland Ambulance Service staff support program Priority One, has been seconded for six months to develop and implement the program and has been working closely with Child Safety staff. I thank the Minister for Emergency Services for allowing Paul to come across to my department.

Mr Cummins: We want him back!

Mr REYNOLDS: The member wants him back, and he will be back in a few months. The program is one element of a larger staff support program which includes post-incident briefing, Employee Assistance Scheme counselling, education, and recruit training and research. I am very proud of the work the department is doing in this area, and I take this opportunity to congratulate Paul and the research team

who have been working towards ensuring that staff receive the support and care they need to carry out their very important work with vulnerable children and young people and their families and to build the best model of child protection services in Australia.