



Speech by

Hon. Mike Reynolds

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Thursday, 11 November 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Department of Child Safety, Annual Report

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.16 a.m.): This morning I tabled the first annual report of the Department of Child Safety—a report for the period 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004—which unfortunately highlights some of the aspects of our society which tragically impact on our children and young people but which also gives a great deal of hope for the future. The figures show an increasing level of notifications of child abuse and neglect in a year when systemic failure and dysfunction had occurred in our child protection system. The figures also show that the Department of Child Safety is making massive inroads into swiftly dealing with the backlog of child abuse notifications. The Beattie government is determined to continue to ensure that the safety of children and our young people in this state continues to be our top priority.

This annual report reflects the period during which the CMC inquiry was conducted and reported, the preparation and delivery of the blueprint for reform, and the initial stages of the change process within the child protection system in Queensland. It clearly demonstrates why the unprecedented additional resources committed to child protection by the Beattie government were so desperately needed. This is why we now have a stand-alone government department focused on the protection of children—the first of its kind in Australia.

Queensland is not alone. The number of reported cases of child abuse and neglect is increasing at a rapid rate right across the country and around the world. As members will see, the report highlights that the number of child protection cases notified has risen by 3,955 since 2002-03. This, despite the often tragic nature of these notifications, is in fact a positive sign. It means more people are reporting cases of abuse and neglect than ever before. It means that more people are becoming aware of the horrific nature of this abuse and are taking steps to prevent or expose these cases.

The CMC report of last year forced the issue into the public domain. We are fortunate that this issue has had significant publicity and that perpetrators can be exposed. Much has been achieved in a relatively short period of time, and we are progressing at a rapid rate. Cases of suspected child abuse and neglect are being dealt with more swiftly than ever before, with the establishment of the new Department of Child Safety.

Figures released in the 2003-04 Department of Child Safety annual report show that the department is making massive inroads into swiftly dealing with a backlog of child abuse notifications. Since the January 2004 CMC inquiry, the backlog has continued to decrease despite an overall increase in the number of child abuse notifications recorded. In June this year the number of initial assessments finalised by the department was 2,498—the largest number ever completed in one month.

A number of very successful departmental campaigns have brought child abuse and neglect to the forefront of public awareness. Our parents, grandparents, neighbours, teachers, nurses and children are becoming more aware of the warning signs of child abuse, and where to go for help, and they are becoming more aware that this abhorrent abuse should not be tolerated in our community. As a result, we

are receiving more notifications of child abuse than ever before. In fact, reporting has become mandatory for nurses. Despite more people coming forward and raising alarms for us, we are also more equipped than ever before to respond to these notifications.

A massive recruitment campaign held earlier this year saw the appointment of an extra 48 fully qualified child safety officers permanently appointed to the most important priority areas throughout the state. A further 60 existing, long-term temporary positions in area and zonal offices have also been made permanent. Over the next three years an additional 518 front-line and support staff will be employed by the department, with 318 of these positions to be filled by the end of 2005.

Increased culturally competent support offered by the Department of Child Safety for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is ensuring the safety and wellbeing of their children. Three hundred families were assisted during the trial period. Of the 451 children supported, 97 per cent did not enter or re-enter the statutory system. As a result of this initiative, 48 indigenous child safety support officers will be employed across the state to continue this important work.

The 2003-04 annual report outlines that, although the cost of individualised placement and support packages increased in the last financial year, more children and young people are now able to receive this very specialised care as a result of the extra funding. Children who are unable to be looked after in the mainstream foster care system are benefiting from the additional \$11.7 million worth of funding given to the Department of Child Safety for alternative care earlier this year.

Children are the No. 1 focus of my department. The next two years will see the establishment of some of the most progressive approaches to child protection in the world. Child protection is everybody's business.