



Speech by

Hon. Mike Reynolds

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

Hansard Thursday, 25 November 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.14 a.m.): This has been an extremely important year for children in Queensland. The landmark reforms being made to the child protection system in Queensland are setting precedents for other governments around the country and the world, and we are extremely proud of this. The new Department of Child Safety has been working as quickly as humanly possible to implement the 110 recommendations of the CMC inquiry and has been following Peter Forster's blueprint to the letter.

2004 has truly been a new era in child protection. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every staff member of the Department of Child Safety for their commitment and dedication to child protection. This year has been particularly difficult for staff as they transition from the old department of families to the Department of Communities and the Department of Child Safety. I would also like to pay tribute to our partners in non-government organisations, community groups and, of course, our foster carers, who play such a vital role in the care of children in the child protection system. These men and women are true heroes in our communities, and their commitment and dedication should never be forgotten.

While this has been a groundbreaking year in achievements and improvements to the child protection system, we know that our reform program is constantly developing. Seventeen organisations throughout Queensland will share in more than \$2.9 million in funding over three years and one-off funds of more than \$278,000 for family reunification services. These services have long been recognised as having significant benefits to children and young people in alternative care, as well as their families and carers. Our priority in 2004-05 is to work with children and their families within the first 12 months of entry into care and to implement processes that engage family members and significant members of the child's cultural community in decision making. According to research, the majority of children in care return to their families with protective placement only a temporary experience.

The aim of this initiative is to promote the safe reunification of children and young people in alternative care with their family and their community. The successful organisations will provide a range of intervention and support services that promote safe reunifications for children in care with their family where it is in the best interests of the child to do so. Services targeted at specifically supporting the family reunification process for indigenous children in protective care would also benefit from the funding.

There remains, as I have said before, significant overrepresentation of indigenous children and young people in the alternative care system. In response to this we have allocated 19 per cent of the total available funding to indigenous family reunification services. This funding pool is part of \$3.12 million of new money committed to family reunification services in 2004-05. A second new funding instalment of \$1.56 million will be available in the next financial year with total funding for the family reunification initiative rising to \$6.24 million in the 2006-07 financial year.