



Speech by

Hon. Desley Boyle

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard Thursday, 8 February 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.02 am): We are building a world-class child protection system and our staff are crucial in that process. To widen the skills base of the department we have offered scholarships, worth up to \$9,000 each, to study to become child safety officers. These scholarships are designed to attract people who want to change careers and have decided on a move into child protection. Those chosen have therefore life experience and workforce experience that will stand them in good stead.

I am pleased to inform the House that 15 people have been awarded scholarships. Many of those are teachers or nurses already used to working with children. This month they start a six-month bridging course at the University of Queensland to give them the specialised knowledge required by child safety officers. We are constantly trying to recruit more child safety officers for rural and remote areas, so it is great news that 13 of the 15 scholarships are going to people from the regions.

Scholarship winners are from Cairns, Herberton, Ravenshoe, Townsville, Rockhampton, Mackay, Bundaberg, Toowoomba, Roma and South Burnett. The two from Brisbane, I am told, are willing to work wherever they are most needed. I am pleased to say that one recipient is Indigenous and that two amongst them are men. Ideally the proportions of both would have been higher. Unfortunately, we have many Indigenous children in the child protection system and so we need more Indigenous officers to help in our work with these communities. We also need more men in the department to balance out our workforce which is presently 85 per cent women.

We have also given seven universities \$50,000 each to update courses for people seeking a career in child protection. It is so important that we have the best training for our workers. So, whether it is improved courses for the next wave of child safety workers or attracting people from other professions, we are diversifying and strengthening our workforce as we create a child protection system in which all Queenslanders can have confidence.