



Speech by

Hon. Desley Boyle

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard Wednesday, 14 March 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Indigenous Children in Care

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.14 am): In Queensland 20 per cent of children in care are Indigenous and that is, of course, too many. We have improved services for Indigenous children, but we can do more and we can do it better. I am pleased to announce that I have approved increased funding and a restructure of the department's Indigenous Services and Development Branch. The new set-up will cost an extra \$246,000 a year, bringing the total to \$1.48 million. This will fund more staff and place them where we need them most: on the ground in the regions and at a senior level in central office making sure Indigenous children are a focus in everything we do.

The new initiative includes seven Indigenous support officers based in each of the department's zones. These officers will work with Indigenous communities to help them recruit and train Indigenous foster carers. They will also support existing Indigenous carers and provide cultural advice on all Indigenous children in care. These support officers will work closely with existing organisations to increase their capacity. We have funding available for more of these organisations; we just need more people with the skills to run them.

As we all know, there are more Indigenous children in the cape and the gulf and so we will have a special focus there. Recruitment will start soon for a senior person each in Cairns and Townsville to work on specific initiatives for communities in those regions. These resource officers will work with the communities to identify what they need and will liaise with other government departments to get things happening on the ground.

There will also be new senior staff in each of the department's five divisions, including an Indigenous champion in the director-general's office. They will ensure that Indigenous expertise and cultural knowledge is incorporated into every area of the Department of Child Safety's services.

Finally, I take this opportunity to appeal to Indigenous people to become foster carers. We will provide training and support. The sad news is that there are too many vulnerable and abused Indigenous children and they really need help.