



Speech by

Hon. Desley Boyle

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard Wednesday, 23 May 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Protection

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.23 am): I recently informed the House that I had approved funding to establish a Practice Branch within the Department of Child Safety to provide specialist advice to staff on best practice in child protection. The first person to be appointed to this unit will start work early next month. She is a specialist in the field of drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Parents who abuse drugs and alcohol and the consequences for their children is an issue too well known to child safety staff. And it is now headline news following a report by the Australian National Council on Drugs which estimated that 13 per cent of children between two and 12 live in homes where they are regularly exposed to substance abuse. The report also estimated that across Australia 14,000 children are exposed to methamphetamines in the family home, 40,000 children live with adults who use marijuana daily, while 231,000 children—almost one in seven—live with binge-drinking adults.

Whatever substance is misused in the home, the results for the children are similar—abuse and neglect. There are some who say, 'Well, it's okay if you don't do it in front of the children.' That is not true. Children may be left to go without food or clothing because household income is spent on booze or drugs because that is put first. The children may miss school after a night of little sleep, kept awake by their parents partying and then, after the partying, by abuse and violence. Such children may be undernourished, stressed, bruised and ashamed. These are the kinds of situations when child safety officers are left with no choice but to remove children. This is why I have no doubt our front-line staff will welcome the new drug and alcohol specialist and look forward to the extra training and support that they will receive. It is to be hoped also that we will find some new and improved ways of dealing with parents in these volatile circumstances for the sake of the children.