



Speech by

Hon. Margaret Keech

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

Hansard Thursday, 12 February 2009

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Foster and Kinship Carers

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women) (10.18 am): Queensland has more than 7,000 children in care because their parents cannot, or they are not able to, protect them from harm or the risk of harm. When my department must step in to protect these children, our priority is to place them with foster or kinship carers who will give them the safety, stability and love they so desperately need. Across Queensland, more than 3,500 foster and kinship carers have opened their homes to take in abused and neglected children. Foster and kinship carers are the heart and soul of Queensland's child protection system.

Mr Schwarten: Hear, hear!

Mrs KEECH: Without their support my department simply could not protect Queensland's at-risk children. I recognise the support of the Leader of the House.

Unfortunately, the number of children coming into care continues to rise: from approximately 4,400 in 2004 to around 7,100 today. We urgently need more of these foster and kinship carers. That is why the Bligh government last year on Mother's Day launched a \$15-million, five-year campaign to recruit, train and support foster and kinship carers. Our goal is to recruit an additional 500 carers. The campaign was so successful that more than 6,000 people registered an interest in becoming a carer. I am pleased today to announce that we are ahead of our recruitment schedule. I can confirm that as of yesterday, 11 February, 156 new carers have already been approved. At this rate, we expect to have more than 500 new carers by the middle of the year. We need extra full-time, part-time and emergency carers who can support our current band of carers.

The Bligh government is building a stronger and fairer Queensland through its Toward Q2 strategy. The strategy includes a goal to increase the number of volunteers in Queensland by 50 per cent. Our new foster and kinship carers and all those yet to be approved will help the government achieve this goal. Foster and kinship carers really are our true community heroes. I thank members of parliament, particularly those on the Bligh government's team, who have supported the recruitment drive. Your assistance has been invaluable in giving Queensland's most vulnerable children a new start to life. I urge the people of Queensland to continue supporting this important campaign and consider becoming a foster or kinship carer.