

Question on Notice
No. 1136
Asked on 29 September 2004

MR FINN asked the Minister for Child Safety (MR REYNOLDS)-

QUESTION:

Will he outline the progress of addressing the Crime and Misconduct Commission's recommendations regarding the Foster Care System?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for his question and for his strong advocacy on behalf of children and families in his electorate. I am pleased to elaborate on the progress we have made in implementing the recommendations of the CMC inquiry.

The aim of the reform process is to build an integrated continuum of family based and non-family based care services with the capacity and diversity to respond to the range of therapeutic interventions and placement needs of children and young people in Queensland under 18 years of age who are subject to statutory child protection intervention.

The process of strengthening and expanding alternative care and support services will occur over three years, concluding in 2007.

A key element of the *Blueprint* is to increase the current alternative care placement capacity to over 360 places by the end of 2006-2007. In moving towards this target, the department advertised funding on 17 April 2004 of \$13.2M for family-based care for children with complex to extreme needs, and non-family based care for children with moderate to extreme needs. This funding equates to 134 places – 116 new places and 18 enhanced places for children and young people in a mix of family based and non-family based places.

In addition to addressing the needs of children in relation to foster care placements a range of other reforms are also underway or completed as we progress on implementing the full scope of reforms recommended by the CMC to improve the child protection system.

These reforms include:

- Official launch of the Department of Child Safety on 24 September 2004.
- the government allocated \$269 million operational and \$35 million capital funding to the department in the 2004-05 State Budget;
- a major recruitment drive was developed, with the department now well advanced in recruiting 318 additional frontline and para-professional support positions;

- the department's organisational profile has been determined, with direct child safety services to be delivered progressively from seven zones and 46 Child Safety Service Centres;
- the Director-General and Deputy Director-General have been appointed;
- acting Senior Executive Directors, Zonal Directors and the Director of the Indigenous Support and Development Unit have been appointed, with recruitment and selection processes for permanent appointments currently underway;
- on 24 September 2004, the positions of Child Safety Service Centre Manager (46), Senior Practitioner (19), Team Leader (138) and Court Coordinator (33) were advertised;
- a comprehensive staff training program has been established;
- foster care allowances have been increased with an interim across-the-board increase of \$40 a fortnight;
- since July 2004, foster carers who look after children and young people with high or complex support needs started receiving an extra \$24 each fortnight to reflect the additional demands, and carers of babies aged 0-1 years received an extra \$20 each fortnight. The one-off establishment payment for foster carers increased from \$200 to \$375, and the start-up payment also increased from \$50 to \$60;
- the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2004, was passed on 16 June 2004 completing the Stage One legislative reforms set out in the Blueprint;
- on 20 October 2004, the Parliament passed the Stage Two legislative reforms. These reforms include:
 - longer term machinery of Government legislation for the Department of Child Safety;
 - mandatory reporting for doctors and registered nurses;
 - legislating for SCAN teams;
 - disclosure of information to carers;
 - duty of disclosure to departments and non-government organisations;
 - development of case plans for children in care;
 - submission of case plans to the court; and
 - refining guardianship orders and short term protection orders;
- an extra \$24.4 million will go to create a more integrated Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) system over the next three years, with pilot programs commenced in Logan and Townsville on 20 September 2004;
- the new Indigenous Support and Development Unit in Cairns to support Indigenous organisations was announced on 23 July 2004. The acting Director of the Unit commenced officially on 11 October 2004 and took up duty in Cairns on 14 October 2004;
- the Statewide Child Protection Partnership Taskforce commenced in July 2004, and is meeting monthly to progress partnership arrangements between the department and key stakeholders with an interest in child protection service delivery;
- a multi-agency network of Child Safety Directors has been established to coordinate and focus the child-centred efforts of the Department of Child Safety and its ten government partners in child protection; and
- a multi-agency project team has progressed the development of enhanced services for children in care. In 2005, the department (in collaboration with Queensland Health and Disability Services Queensland) will commence a program to expand therapeutic care options and treatment programs for children in care with severe

psychological and behavioural problems. This includes establishing five additional specialist mental health units for children and young people with specialist needs.

I am pleased to report that the Department of Child Safety is on track to implementing the 110 recommendations of the CMC report in line with the timeframes set out in the blueprint. We are working towards having the majority of the CMC recommendations fully implemented by the beginning of 2006.

Successful applicants were advised in early September 2004.

The number of foster carers in Queensland is definitely on the way up. I am very pleased to advise that the total number of new carers approved by my Department has increased by 25% when compared with the number last financial year.

The number of approved carers has risen from 803 last financial year to 1,004 so far this financial year, an increase of 201 carers.

Part of the strategy to increase placement capacity includes the recruitment of a more diverse group of carers to meet specific needs of children and young people. In relation to this recommendation, a *Foster Carer Information Kit* was launched on 10 September 2004. The kit contains a series of brochures, posters and fact sheets about the types of foster care and the steps to becoming a carer. The kit is available to all people interested in becoming a carer.

A number of strategies have been undertaken to strengthen support within the existing carer networks, including enhanced foster carer training and increases to foster carer allowances.

In partnership with the sector, a new package, *Quality Care – Foster Care Training* has been developed. The package includes a 60 minute training video that will support flexible training delivery options, particularly in rural and remote communities, detailed trainer's notes, and participants' handouts and learning worksheets.

An extensive 'train the trainer' program to implement the new training package will rollout through Queensland during October and November 2004. A standardised proforma for the assessment of potential carers has been developed and will also be implemented.

A number of increases in the government's contribution to the costs of caring for a child or young person in care in Queensland have also been introduced.

Queensland foster carers receive an allowance, which is a partial contribution towards the direct costs of looking after children in foster care. The fostering allowance is a fortnightly payment and is not a form of taxable income. The allowance covers items such as food, clothing, household provisions, gifts, pocket money and entertainment for the child or young person in care.

On 1 July 2004, foster carers looking after babies or children with special needs or carers taking on new placements received a boost to their reimbursements. This is in addition to the \$40 per fortnight increase to the base foster carer allowance, which became effective in January this year.

Approved foster carers who look after children and young people with high or complex support needs are receiving an extra \$24 each fortnight, and carers of babies aged up to 1 year are receiving an extra \$20 each fortnight.

The one-off establishment payments and start-up payments for all carers have also been increased. The establishment payment has increased from \$200 to \$375, and the start-up payment increased from \$50 to \$60.

Carers living in remote areas such as Longreach, Cape York and Roma will receive a 10 percent loading in recognition of the extra costs of providing care in these locations. Carers who participate in training programs will also be rewarded with an additional loading.

Further allowances will be implemented from 1 January 2005. These will include allowances for foster carers to participate in advanced carer training and mentoring programs.

In addition, a Consumer Price Index adjustment to the fostering allowance will also be implemented on 1 January 2005.

Caring for children and young people incurs a significant financial and emotional investment and it is essential we recognise the commitment of these dedicated Queenslanders.

Supports for foster carers and improving the alternative care system are key components of the reforms to the child protection system in Queensland.