

**Question on Notice
No. 194
Asked on 27 April 2004**

MRS J STUCKEY asked the Minister for Child Safety (MR REYNOLDS)-

QUESTION:

Will he outline the total amount spent on commercial accommodation arrangements for children at risk in Queensland for 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-04 (year to date)?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for her question and interest in alternative care arrangements employed by the Department of Child Safety.

The government knows that foster care isn't the answer to every vulnerable child's needs and that some young people need an alternative. Currently, only about eight per cent of care in Queensland is delivered outside the conventional foster family setting. The Foster Care Audit conducted by Gwenn Murray late last year recommended this be lifted to 17 per cent. The Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) also recommended in its recent report that the Government increase the capacity of alternative placement options in areas such as residential care and enhanced foster care.

There are some circumstances where there is no option other than to place a child or young person in emergency commercial accommodation for brief periods as an option of last resort where foster care, residential care or other preferable placement options are not available. When young people are placed in commercial accommodation, arrangements are made to ensure proper supervision and support of the child or young person. A number of the young people placed in commercial accommodation exhibit complex and challenging behaviours, which make them difficult to place within the existing foster care and alternative care systems. In addition to having experienced abuse themselves, some of these young people may display a range of inappropriate and high risk behaviours directed toward other children, young people and adults.

A policy governing the use of commercial accommodation was formalised on 22 May 2002 and the Department implemented a database for the 2002-2003 financial year to collect and monitor regional commercial accommodation details. This database has continued to be maintained for the 2003-2004 financial year.

This formalised the accepted previous practice and it ensures that time periods are limited, that adequate supervision and support is provided and that the parent of the child or young person is contacted and consent sought where applicable.

There are some circumstances where there is no option other than to place a young person in emergency commercial accommodation. These are generally young people who may be subject to care and protection and/or juvenile justice orders, who may be

homeless and who have been referred to the Department of Child Safety by other agencies.

The total 2002-2003 financial year accommodation cost was \$54,789. During this period, the department placed 146 children or young people for a total of 1,487 nights. The average cost per placement was \$375, the average cost per night was \$37 and the average length of a placement was 10.18 nights.

The year to date accommodation cost for the 2003-2004 financial year, until 31 March 2004, is \$64,540. During this period, the department has placed 126 children or young people for a total of 1,093 nights. The average cost per placement has been \$512, the average cost per night has been \$59 and the average length of a placement has been 8.67 nights.

The increase in costs in the current financial year reflects the department's policy of seeking better accommodation options. The advantages obtained include an environment allowing for better individual supervision.

As detailed in the Blueprint for the implementation of the CMC recommendations the government is addressing the need to build a robust system of "alternative" care - care that is not in a traditional foster family setting – in Queensland and has allocated a funding package of \$58.5 million over three years to increase the number of alternative care places for young people in need. The government is currently seeking applications under the first round of Alternative Care funding from non-government organisations keen to participate in the collaborative delivery of specific alternative care services for young Queenslanders. Over the next four years we will provide alternative care for 680 young people whose needs are so extreme or unusual that they do not fit into conventional foster families.