

**Question on Notice
No. 310
Asked on 22 March 2005**

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

QUESTION:

Will he advise the number of convicted child-sex offenders who are currently approved carers (either relative or primary) in the Queensland foster system?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for her question.

All carers undergo a series of stringent checks. None of these checks have uncovered any current approved carer who has any convictions, including child sex offences, that would constitute a risk to children.

The Department has a rigorous screening procedure that requires all carer applicants, including general approved, relative and limited approved carers to undergo a detailed assessment process. This assessment process focuses on ensuring the applicant:

- is a suitable person to be an approved carer;
- is able to meet the standards of care in the statement of standards outlined in section 122 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*; and
- is able to help in appropriate ways towards achieving plans for the child's protection.

In order to ensure applicants are suitable persons, a number of personal history checks are undertaken which focus on any risk to children, rather than risk of sexual abuse alone, and include:

- a child protection history check against departmental records;
- a criminal history check;
- a domestic and family violence history check; and
- a traffic history check;

In addition to the suitability checks, departmental policy requires that all foster carer applicants undergo an initial assessment of their suitability. This process includes:

- the successful completion of *Quality Care: Foster Care Training*;
- a medical assessment;
- at least two character references; and
- a *Foster Carer Assessment*.

Relative and limited approved carers also undergo an assessment report of their suitability.

Currently, all foster carers are approved in the first instance for a period of 12 months and are reassessed at the end of that time. As part of the reassessment process, criminal, traffic, domestic and family violence and child protection history checks are conducted again. If foster carers remain assessed as suitable persons, they are provided with an additional approval period of up to two years. The renewal process (inclusive of criminal history checks) continues to occur every two years.

When information regarding an existing carer's suitability to remain a carer comes to the attention of the Department of Child Safety (including criminal history such as the charge or conviction of a person for a child sex offence), their authority to care is reassessed and if required their status is amended, suspended or cancelled. This information may be provided through such avenues as a child, Department of Child Safety employee, Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian or community member reporting concerns to the department.

An example of our rigorous monitoring includes the foster care audit covering all notifications on carers received from January 1999 to June 2003, stage 1 of which was undertaken by Gwen Murray. As a result of this audit of foster carers, information came to the attention of the department which was swiftly acted upon. The department has now created an internal audit team to continue to audit all foster carer notifications received by the department since July 2003.

As part of current reforms focused on implementing the Crime and Misconduct Commission's recommendations, the department is enhancing policies and practices to better monitor changes in personal histories including child protection, criminal, domestic and family violence and traffic offences.

In addition, the *Blueprint for Reform* outlined a three-stage process for the introduction of necessary legislative amendments for the implementation of the child protection reforms. Stage one and two of the reforms were introduced and passed in 2004 and stage three is currently being developed for introduction in mid 2005. Some stage three amendments focus on the improvement of initial and ongoing carer screening.