

**Question on Notice
No. 763
Asked on 24 May 2005**

MS R MENKENS asked the Minister for Child Safety (MR REYNOLDS)-

QUESTION:

For each of the last two financial years and for the year to date (reported separately) -

- (1) What was the number of children at risk placed in commercial accommodation and what level of supervision was provided in those instances?
- (2) What was the average length of stay for each child?
- (3) What was the average cost per placement and what was the total cost of placing children in commercial accommodation for the above years?

ANSWER:

The Department of Child Safety uses commercial accommodation as an option of last resort. When children or young people are placed in commercial accommodation, arrangements are made to ensure proper supervision and support of the child or young person.

A policy of using commercial accommodation as a last resort was formalised on 22 May 2002. This formalises the accepted previous practice and ensures that time periods are limited, that adequate supervision and support occurs and that the parent of the child or young person is contacted and consent sought where applicable.

However, there are some circumstances where there is no other 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 or who may be homeless and who have been referred to the department by other agencies. A database was implemented for the 2002/2003 financial year to collect and monitor zonal commercial accommodation details. This database has been maintained for the 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 financial years.

In the 2002/2003 financial year, accommodation costs were \$54,789. During this period, the former Department of Families had placed 213 children or young people for a total of 1,487 nights. The average cost per placement was \$257.20 and the average length of a placement was 6.98 nights.

In the 2003/2004 financial year, accommodation costs were \$113,973. During this period, the former Department of Families and the new Department of Child Safety had placed 165 children or young people for a total of 1,829 nights. The average cost per placement was \$690 and the average length of a placement was 11.08 nights.

In the period 1 July 2004 to 30 April 2005, accommodation costs are \$218,003. During this period, the new Department of Child Safety had placed 590 children or young people for a total of 2,860 nights. The average cost per placement was \$369 and the average length of a placement was 4.8 nights.

The Department of Child Safety currently provides placement options to meet the range and complexity of support needs of the approximately 5,646 children and young people in alternative care. This represents an increase of approximately 1,500 children and young people requiring placement since 2003/2004.

This significant increase in the number of children and young people requiring placement has placed additional pressure on current placement options. In 2004/2005, a multi-tiered approach, comprising state level activities, local area activities and targeted activities was instigated to address the need to increase foster carer numbers. This requirement, with the additional non-family based placement under development, will address the need for continued use of commercial accommodation.

As of 31 March 2005, there were 1,634 approved foster carer households in Queensland or 2,462 individually approved carers. There has been an increase of 64 carers in March 2005 alone. Between September 2004 and March 2005, there were 1,060 new carer households approved. This includes 365

general approval foster carers, 282 limited approval carers, and 413 relative carers. During the same period of the previous year (September 2003 until March 2004), there were 666 new carer households approved. This consisted of 197 general approval foster carers, 213 limited approval carers and 256 relative carers.

Since August 2004, I have also approved new funding of \$12.9M to provide 136 new and enhanced alternative care places.

A further \$5M has been brought forward from the 2006/2007 financial year to the 2005/2006 financial year (to increase available funding to \$15M) to provide an additional 164 alternative care places for children and young people with complex and extreme support needs.

Increasing the pool of foster parents is critical to achieving improved child safety outcomes. In 2004/2005, the focus has been on planning for a foster carer recruitment campaign and on developing and producing an array of resource materials for use during 2005/2006. The active phase of the recruitment campaign is currently planned to occur during 2005/2006, notably during the first half of the financial year.

A statewide media campaign is planned to commence on 1 August 2005 and run for approximately six months, with a week of paid print and radio advertising each month. Advertising will be complemented by a mass mail-out of promotional materials to parents, citizens and friends groups, public libraries, MP's offices and community groups.

Specific strategies have been developed to attract more carers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with additional funding of \$4.8M allocated for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Shared Family Care services through the community sector.