

Question on Notice

No. 1476

Asked on Wednesday, 29 November 2006

MR DICKSON MP asked the Minister for Communities, Disability Services, Seniors and Youth (**MR PITT**)

- (1) What progress has been made by the Government to assist Queensland grandparents, parenting grandchildren broken down by (a) financial assistance, (b) access to services currently only available to parents and registered foster care parents and (c) training by welfare agencies to acknowledge the isolation and sense of frustration felt by grandparents parenting grandchildren due to lack of support and no formal recognition of their role and their needs?
- (2) What arrangements has he made with the Commonwealth Government to take advantage of available Federal funding for grandparents parenting grandchildren?
- (3) With the increase in numbers of grandparents parenting grandchildren will he provide details on (a) the number of grandparents parenting grandchildren in south east Queensland, (b) the increase over the past two years in the number of grandparents parenting grandchildren in south east Queensland and (c) the funding and services provided to grandparents parenting grandchildren by all other State Governments?

ANSWER:

Grandparents raising grandchildren can experience financial hardship, social isolation and poor health, ultimately resulting in carer burnout. To reduce this stress, and give grandparents a break from parenting pressures, the Department of Communities has developed the *Time for Grandparents* program (allocating \$584,000 a year) that refers grandparents and grandchildren to a range of recreational activity programs.

Time for Grandparents is designed to give grandparents some much needed time out from parenting with the knowledge that their grandchildren are participating in constructive, fully supervised activities. The program uses a number of respected service providers, including Scouts Queensland, Girl Guides Queensland, Sport and Recreation Queensland and the Queensland Police Citizens Youth Club.

Trained counsellors respond to telephone enquires from grandparents and refer them and their grandchildren to children's activity programs that meet their individual needs, including overnight holiday camps and social, recreational and sporting activities. All *Time for Grandparents* activities are provided free of charge.

In addition to the *Time for Grandparents* program, the Queensland Government has implemented the \$100,000 *Information for Grandparents* initiative. Recent Australian research indicates that accessing relevant information is one of the greatest challenges for grandparents raising children. This initiative creates a one stop shop for information and referrals relevant to grandparents raising children, increasing their access to services traditionally targeted at parents. Grandparents may access the service by calling the Seniors Enquiry Line on 1300 135 500. The Seniors Enquiry Line recently completed a series of consultations in Cairns, Mackay, Townsville, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay, Toowoomba, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Mt Isa and Brisbane.

The *Information for Grandparents* initiative can also provide information to service providers to help them understand grandparents' needs. A recent example is the inclusion of Centrelink representatives in several of the consultation sessions.

In 2004, the Premier placed the issue of financial support for grandparents on the Council of Australian Governments agenda. Negotiations were initiated between the South Australian government and the Commonwealth government to develop a mechanism to allow grandparents, who are informally raising their grandchildren, to be eligible for appropriate Commonwealth Government payments and support services. However, despite heavy lobbying from the Queensland Government as well, the Commonwealth Government has, to date, refused to acknowledge the need to review these grandparents' eligibility for Centrelink benefits. Financial support for families falls clearly under the Commonwealth Government's mandate for income support and the Queensland Government will continue to lobby the Commonwealth Government for a fairer deal for grandparents raising children.

Currently, there is no reliable data source to measure the number of grandparents raising children in southeast Queensland. However, 2006 census figures may provide demographic data regarding grandparents raising grandchildren.

A recent scan carried out by the Western Australian Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering indicates that most other states do not provide financial support for Grandparents raising children outside the statutory care and protection system. The scan also indicates that Queensland is a leader in providing support services to this target group. It is the Department of Communities' understanding that Queensland and Western Australia are the only state jurisdictions that provide funded services specifically targeted to grandparents raising children outside statutory care and protection systems.

In regard to the Member's question about what funding and services other state governments provide to grandparents parenting grandchildren, with respect, I suggest he directs enquiries to the appropriate agencies in those jurisdictions.