

Question on Notice
No. 1567
Asked on 30 November 2006

MS CAROLYN MALE MP, asked the Minister for Child Safety (MS BOYLE)-

QUESTION:

How is the Beattie Labor Government assisting foster carers in continuing their vital work with disadvantaged children?

ANSWER:

Foster and kinship carers are the department's most valuable partners in caring for the state's vulnerable children and young people. There are a number of new initiatives currently being undertaken by the Department of Child Safety which will enhance the support provided to carers.

Firstly, to support carers it is important to have a sufficient pool of carers to ensure matching of carers and children, which in turn, enhances placement stability and better outcomes for children and young people as well as carers.

With more than 6,000 children in care and an ever increasing demand on child protection services to meet the placement needs of these children, the department launched a major foster care recruitment campaign in September 2005. The department's foster care recruitment enquiry line has received in excess of 2,400 calls from interested members of the public since the campaign began.

While it is vital that we increase the number of carers in Queensland, it is just as important that we are able to offer children culturally appropriate placements. The foster carer recruitment campaign includes strategies to address the urgent need for carers from all cultural backgrounds, but particularly people who are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Sudanese, Samoan, and Vietnamese.

In addition to recruiting more carers, it is also critical that the department supports existing carers to meet the day-to-day costs of looking after children.

I am pleased to advise that the Queensland Government recently announced that all Queensland carers received an increase of up to \$100 a fortnight for each child in their care. As from 1 January 2007, carer allowances will now be between \$370 and \$434 a fortnight per child. The new and improved carer allowance system will also be simpler to use for both staff and carers.

While currently carers have to apply to the department for the reimbursement of small outlays, with the new system, the majority of the costs of caring for a child will be built into the fortnightly allowance. For the first time, the tax-free allowances will also be linked to the cost of living, ensuring they rise every January in line with the Consumer Price Index.

Carers will also benefit from improved access to therapeutic services for children with complex emotional, psychological and behavioural problems. The statewide Child Safety Therapeutic and Behaviour Support teams (known as 'Evolve') have been established to provide professional treatment programs for these children, supported by a budget of \$17.2

million for the 2006-07 financial year. The program is based upon a collaborative model of service provision involving the Department of Child Safety, Queensland Health, Disability Services Queensland, and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts.

Another collaborative initiative between the Department of Child Safety and Queensland Health that will have great benefits for foster carers is the Child Health Passport. Queensland is the first state to institute this system, where each child entering care will undergo a full baseline medical assessment. A health plan will then be developed to meet the child's needs. For as long as the child remains in care the health plan will be reviewed at least yearly and more often if required. The health plan, medical records, and information on how to meet the day-to-day health needs of the child will be contained in the Child Health Passport. A copy of the passport will be given to any new carer or to the parent if the child returns home.

The Child Health Passport was piloted at five locations, including metropolitan, rural, and remote locations throughout Queensland from January to July 2006 and will be progressively implemented for all children in care commencing in early 2007.

The Child Safety Practice Manual, which is available online to carers, includes a procedure on the provision of support and supervision to carers and will soon include a practice paper on the topic in order to provide assistance to departmental staff in supporting carers.

In addition, the Child Safety Practice Manual states that the types of ongoing supports to assist carers in developing relevant skills and knowledge include, but are not limited to:

- access to training and other opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills applicable to their role as a carer;
- regular visits from a Child Safety Officer or worker from a foster and kinship care service for the purposes of support and supervision;
- access to peer support through local networks of carers and carer support groups;
- access to Fostering Advocacy and Support Team representatives;
- access to community based support groups specific to various medical, developmental or behavioural needs or issues that children in care may present with;
- facilitation of carer access to other organisations, both local and state; and
- access to a range of relevant resource materials.

The department realises that there is still much work to be done. However, the department remains committed to working with foster carers and our government and non-government partners to continuously improve Queensland's child protection system and ensure the ongoing safety of our children and young people.