

**Question on Notice
No. 912
Asked on 26 May 2006**

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

QUESTION:

"With reference to frontline child safety staff who have a difficult and often emotionally challenging job - What support is he providing to hard working and dedicated staff of his department?"

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Mount Ommaney for her question and for her longstanding and commendable interest in child protection matters.

There is no denying that the work undertaken by staff of the Department of Child Safety is complex and emotionally challenging. To support frontline child safety staff, a significant number of practical tools and strategies have been developed and implemented including:

- new Structured Decision Making Tools to guide professional judgement;
- a new Child Safety Practice Manual to support staff in implementing legislation and policy;
- significant additional funding to the community sector and to other government agencies for out-of- home care, intensive family support, therapeutic and other services; and
- a major campaign to recruit 500 new foster carers.

In order to support staff in the delivery of frontline services, over 470 additional staff have been employed over the last two years. In 2006-07, an additional 50 Child Safety Officers will be employed in accordance with Blueprint projections and 22 will be engaged to staff new service delivery hubs.

New and existing staff now have access to improved entry level and competency based training programs and new induction and development programs for service centre managers, team leaders and senior practitioners have commenced and will continue to be delivered.

Staff are all completing performance and learning plans and there is a focus on improved professional supervision for child safety service delivery staff by their team leaders. Senior practitioners are available to frontline staff for guidance and advice on complex cases.

The safety and wellbeing of frontline staff is a primary consideration and is being improved through a number of strategies and interventions including:

- a new integrated client management system;
- new and upgraded workplace accommodation and facilities;
- the development of a new induction resource on workplace health and safety and security to be delivered to all staff in child safety service centres;
- a new employee support program, including a trained network of peer support officers in place across the state; and
- implementation of the zero tolerance of workplace aggression strategy to inform clients that they can expect to be treated with respect by departmental officers and that any abusive, threatening or aggressive behaviour on the client's behalf will not be tolerated.

The department employs a team of workplace health and safety (WHS) advisors who are based at various locations throughout the State. They provide expert WHS advice, support and training for staff and managers specific to the risks confronting staff in a fully operational child protection working environment. WHS representatives have also been nominated by their peers at most child safety service centres and have helped to establish local WHS committees within four of the department's seven zones.

In addition, the department's Employee Support Service (ESS) provides a range of services to promote the physical, psychological and emotional health and wellbeing of departmental personnel. The ESS oversees a Peer Support Officer (PSO) network, consisting of more than eighty PSOs who are based around the State in service delivery roles. The ESS is supplemented by the Employee Assistance Service (EAS), a facility which provides external counselling and debriefing to departmental staff affected by personal difficulties, work-related issues or exposure to specific traumatic incidents. Specialist support is available for particular staff groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.