

Question on Notice
No. 1931
Asked on Thursday, 15 November 2007.

MRS DIANNE REILLY MP, asked the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women (MRS KEECH) -

QUESTION:

Would the Minister provide details of the Queensland Government's role in child protection and the outcomes of the Australian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect held on the Gold Coast in early November?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for her question and commend her on her continuing commitment to the protection of children. The Government's role in child protection is significant. It is to protect children and young people who have been harmed or neglected, or who are at risk of harm and neglect and to secure their future and wellbeing.

This role requires service professionals and organisations to deal with complex social and economic circumstances and with varying behaviours of individuals as they engage with families.

The Department of Child Safety operates with the perspective that "child protection is everybody's business".

The Department's own services involve engaging with families where children or young people are considered to be at risk, assessing their protective needs and providing appropriate responses which include supporting families and, if necessary, placing a child or young person in an out-of-home setting.

Services provided by other departments include providing support to meet health, education and particular therapeutic needs for children and young people in the child protection system and services provided by non-government organisations include providing the majority of out-of-home placements and intensive support for families where a child or young person remains with their family.

The Department also funds Indigenous organisations which provide cultural advice where an Indigenous child or young person comes into contact with the statutory child protection system.

The Department undertakes a continuous assessment of research and engages researchers on particular topics to inform best practice in child protection.

A recent example of the Department's initiative has been its collaboration for the 2007 Australian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect (ACCAN) themed as "Voices calling for action".

Working with representatives from government and non-government agencies and universities for two years, the Department planned and prepared a conference program with keynote speakers from Australia, New Zealand, England, Canada and Hong Kong and a

parallel program for young delegates. Both were acknowledged by the more than 650 participants as extremely successful.

Participants came from every Australian jurisdiction, New Zealand and other countries and included child protection practitioners, academics, community members and professionals from adjacent fields including education, law, policing and health.

Particular messages included:

- the need to hear the voices of young people in child protection work across the sector, including through direct engagement with young people was powerfully reinforced by young delegates;
- the risk factors connected with child abuse and neglect, including poor early parent-child attachment, low school attendance, little social support, domestic violence, poverty and drugs and alcohol misuse and the high incidence of mental health issues arising for children in care;
- the need to understand children's attachment and the importance of stable, healthy relationships;
- the need to consider a 'public health' model in response to abuse and neglect where support and intervention is provided early on, including child-centred services that extend to parents, such as maternal and child health, early childhood education and care and school and adult-centred services that extend to the child; for example adult mental health, family violence and drug treatment services;
- the need to look for opportunities to engage others in decision making to enhance the safety and wellbeing of the child and develop a common language in multi-disciplinary practice;
- the need to preserve the culture and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to enhance their long-term wellbeing;
- recognition of the importance of children's wellbeing within the whole community and that child neglect and abuse are part of a wider problem of declining wellbeing for young people;
- the need for community education and information to raise awareness about child protection issues and foster community engagement and ownership of children services; and
- the need for continuing to collaborate to eliminate child abuse and neglect.

In my role as Minister for Child Safety, I intend to consider the messages of the young people at the conference and take on board the research findings so Queensland can be innovative in continually improving our child protection system to meet the safety, wellbeing and developmental needs of children.