

**Question on Notice
No. 442
Asked on 14 March 2007**

MR MICHAEL CHOI asked the Minister for Child Safety (MS BOYLE) -

QUESTION:

With reference to the support of foster carers in Queensland-
What new initiative has been implemented to assist foster carers to provide better care to those in need?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for his question and for his interest in this important area of the Department of Child Safety's work. Foster Carers are the lifeblood of the child protection system and we could not provide the protection we do for nearly 7000 abused or neglected children in Queensland without the thousands of dedicated foster carers across the State.

A number of recent initiatives have been developed by the department to enhance the quality of support available to carers including:

Learning and Development Resources

- A suite of learning and development resources, including specialised training for carers who have particular training needs that are not able to be met by existing advanced training modules. The *Quality Care: Foster Care Training* package is delivered in three stages: pre-service training; standard training; and advanced training.

Carer Participation Policy

- The development of a Carer Participation policy that states that the department is committed to promoting a partnership with carers that recognises the integral part played by carers in the child protection system. Funds are available to support the implementation of this policy. Activities include carer support groups and forums to disseminate current information and policy changes that impact on carers. These forums provide the opportunity for Child Safety Service Centre managers to thank the carers for their contribution to providing children with safe and nurturing environments in which to grow.

Foster Carer Excellence Awards

- Ongoing recognition and valuing of carers through the Foster Carer Excellence Awards and the State-wide Foster Care week activities and events.

Foster and Kinship Care Support Hotline

- The Foster and Kinship Care Support Hotline, which will commence operation on 30 April 2007 will support foster and kinship carers after business hours. Staff operating the line will provide solution focused support to carers in relation to: current departmental policies and procedures, positive behavioural management strategies and advice, brief counselling and support, advocacy and assistance in accessing services.

True Costs of Care Project

- The completion of the True Costs of Care project, led to an increased quantum of payment to carers reflective of the true cost of caring for a child in care and simplified administration of these funds. From 1 January 2007, my department introduced an increase to the previous fostering allowance to create the new Fortnightly Caring Allowance. This allowance will cover all direct care costs for the child and young person, general wear and tear on carer's household items and pro rata costs for utilities and appliances. The Fortnightly Caring Allowance incorporates a real increase to the base allowance and a child related cost component rolled up to remove the necessity for carers to claim separately for the most commonly incurred

expenses. The new fortnightly caring allowances are tax free and not considered an income by the Australian Taxation Office.

- Carers receive differing amounts depending on the age of the child. The new fortnightly allowances are:
 - Children up to one year: \$370.61 (an increase of \$107.48);
 - Children 2 to 5: \$370.61 (an increase of \$93.17);
 - Children 6 to 10: \$399.26 (an increase of \$74.79);
 - Children 11 to 15: \$434.02 (an increase of \$40.15); and
 - Children 16 and over: \$434.02 (an increase of \$61.54).
- Carers in remote locations receive an additional 10% loading on top of these allowances. One-off establishment payments, which are made available when a child goes into care for the first time, increased from \$375.00 to \$399.26 and will be indexed annually. Annual CPI indexation of the Fortnightly Caring Allowance will commence in January 2008.

Other supports available to carers include:

- regular visits from a child safety officer or worker from a funded non-government foster and kinship care service for the purposes of support and supervision;
- peer support through local networks of carers and carer support groups;
- a Foster Carer Card which helps foster carers and kinship carers in their day-to-day fostering duties by providing easy identification to government agencies and hospitals and access to a range of discounts from participating businesses.

Carers have also been supported through a range of initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of the children and young people for whom they care:

- Evolve Interagency Services, a partnership between Queensland Health (QH), Disability Services Queensland (DSQ), the Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) and the Department of Child Safety provide a therapeutic and behaviour support services for significant behavioural and psychological issues and/or disability behaviour support needs;
- Education Support Plans (ESPs) are developed jointly by DETA and the Department of Child Safety to assist in providing children and young people in care with effective cross-agency support to maximise their educational outcomes; and
- Child Health Passports, an initiative with Queensland Health, help to diagnose and treat the multiple health problems of children who come into care.