

Question on Notice
No. 990
Asked on 8 June 2007

MRS JAN STUCKEY MP asked the Minister for Child Safety (MS BOYLE)-

QUESTION:

With reference to the results in both the Department of Child Safety staff survey and the nongovernment organisation staff survey for 2005 and 2006 which suggest a problem with the department's current recruitment strategy with regard to attracting high quality departmental staff and furthermore, for the past two years the response in the non-government organisation staff survey to the statement 'Child Safety Officers have the knowledge and skills they need to provide effective responses to children' has hovered at around 45 per cent of staff disagreeing –

What specific urgent action is being taken to attract and retain high quality staff that have the skills to provide effective responses to these vulnerable children?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for her question. Let me say at the outset that the Department of Child Safety has a wonderful group of staff who are dedicated to protecting Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people.

The Beattie Government has increased staff numbers by 90 per cent to over 2,300 since the CMC inquiry. Unprecedented staff increases such as these are not an easy task to manage and while some people who have been recruited have found that child protection is not the field for them, on the whole our recruitment strategies have been managed very well. Our staff are employed to protect children. Last years Children's Commission survey results clearly show that our staff are doing a good job of providing support for children. The Commission survey found that 97 per cent of foster children felt safe in their placements and 98.9 per cent felt their carer treated them well.

Our latest recruitment initiative was a targeted national advertising campaign which was launched in November of last year. It resulted in the appointment of 87 Child Safety Officers across the state. This campaign relied on the use of improved advertising, screening and selection techniques aimed at enhancing successful applicants' job fit. A second advertising campaign is currently underway, focussing on Brisbane's western corridor and certain rural and remote areas. Significant financial incentives are also now being offered to staff working in rural and remote areas to improve services to children around the state.

In addition, active promotion of a career in the department as a child protection professional is undertaken through participation in careers fairs at Universities throughout the state and specialised career expos such as:

- the Careers and Employment Expo held during National Careers Week in April 2007 at the Brisbane Convention Centre;
- the Country Week Expo held at the Brisbane Convention Centre 6-7 July 2007; and
- the '@Work & Play- Queensland on Show' Expos to be held in Melbourne 17-19 August and in Sydney 5-7 October 2007.

The Training and Specialist Support Branch (TSSB) was expanded in February 2007 to 29 staff to provide better training services to frontline child protection staff. In partnership with

Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE, the department is delivering the Certificate IV in Community Services (Protective Care) to 150 Child Safety Support Officers and 50 staff from Recognised Entities to ensure they have the skills they need to undertake this valuable work. Since January 2007 all new CSO employees (both permanent and temporary) must commence a six month induction and training program within the first month of start-up. The department also requires team leaders and managers to undertake compulsory supervisory training and all staff must engage in cultural training.

Several changes have also taken place in the way training is delivered to regional areas. Three centrally coordinated but regionally based sub-units of TSSB have been established in the last financial year at Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns and provide a focused approach to delivering training geared for regional audiences. Additionally a number of training programs are now available to all staff, either delivered online by the department or accessible online through the Infonet. These include generic training for all staff (e.g. record keeping, ethics and privacy etc.) and a number of specialist training programs and resources such as rural practice and working with children.

The department is also continuing to support up to as many as 40 social work student placements of between 12 and 18 weeks per year, with a particular focus on regional areas (including Mt Isa, Gladstone, Mackay and the Gulf). In addition, it is undertaking a number of cadetship and scholarship programs across the department. Four scholarships have been awarded to Indigenous employees to gain relevant qualifications for employment as Child Safety Officers, 13 Indigenous Cadets are being sponsored under the National Indigenous Cadetship Project and three high school students are currently sponsored as part of the Education to Employment Scholarship Scheme.

Finally in this area, a bridging scholarship scheme was set up in 2006 in partnership with two universities (the University of Queensland and James Cook University) to enable graduates who do not hold appropriate qualifications to meet the minimum mandatory requirements for the role. Thirty-five bridging scholarship graduates participated in 2006 and 22 are employed by the department (19 in rural and remote areas). A second intake at the University of Queensland has been undertaken in 2007 with a further 14 participants.

A notable success story has been the appointment of a dedicated Human Resources position to the Mt Isa Office and its sister office in the Gulf to address persistent and continued difficulties in attracting staff to these areas. Since filling this position in January 2007 the role has been instrumental in the Mt Isa office increasing its staffing levels from less than 50% of its establishment to 92% currently. The role has been so successful that the initial three month contract has been extended a further three months and the Department is investigating options to replicate this model around the state.

The department's Staffcare Unit has established a number of staff support programs to ensure the best possible support is provided to Child Safety Officers. These include stress management, vicarious trauma awareness and resilience building. The Staffcare Unit is constantly reviewing and updating these support programs.

The department has been progressively upgrading the 'hardware' relating to worker safety at child safety service centres (CSSCs) with the rollout of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) installation and the trialling of satellite and mobile tracking duress alarms systems. These initiatives are part of a suite of programs designed to enhance worker safety and confidence, including the 'expect respect' campaign, a zero tolerance policy for workplace aggression and extra training for workers. The recently developed 'Worker Safety in Child Protection Practice'

training includes a DVD developed by the department with a focus on enabling workers to deal with 'real' situations. This program has been delivered in CSSCs across the state.

Additionally, the department has been undertaking an extensive capital works program to renovate or construct new CSSCs around the state. This program significantly improves the workplace health and safety of our officers.

Finally, the department has developed and recently implemented a series of exit and retention surveys to enable evaluation of the effectiveness of these and other strategies aimed at attraction and retention.