

**Question on Notice
No. 1578
Asked on 29 October 2008**

MRS JANN STUCKEY MP asked the Minister for Child Safety (MRS KEECH)-

QUESTION:

With reference to child safety (CSO) and child safety support officers (CSSO) in 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 to date—

- 1) How many full-time permanent CSO/CSSOs were there in each zone (reported separately)?
- 2) How many unfilled vacant positions were there and how many positions were filled by temporary staff as CSO/CSSO (reported separately by zone)?

ANSWER:

The Bligh Government values highly the role officers of my Department of Child Safety play in protecting vulnerable children.

The Government is committed to protecting our most vulnerable young Queenslanders, and we have backed that commitment with a record \$586.6 million budget allocation to my department. This funding allows us to increase the number of frontline staff, and to better support them. It will lead to better outcomes for young children.

As I have previously advised the Member, staff of my Department of Child Safety are my No 1 priority.

I acknowledge the challenges faced by my child safety officers, and that my Department's separation rate is three times the public service average.

Unlike the LNP, we have a strategy to address this issue.

And it's producing results, with a marked improvement in recent months.

The Bligh Government supports Department of Child Safety staff, unlike the LNP, which makes a habit of unfairly criticising my dedicated and hard-working departmental staff.

The Government has boosted staff numbers, so they can better protect vulnerable children.

As at pay period ending 9 November 2008, the Department had a total of 794.5 full time equivalent (FTE) professional child safety officers (CSOs), an increase of 276.5 since March 2004. Additionally, we have 247 FTE paraprofessional child safety support officers (CSSOs), an increase of 163 since March 2004. These FTE figures incorporate permanent, temporary and casual staff.

The breakdown of full-time permanent CSO and CSSOs (headcount) roles across our seven zones for the last three financial years is detailed below:

ZONE	Position	Full-time Permanent Staff		
		2006-07	2007-08	2008-09*
Brisbane North and Sunshine Coast Zone	Child Safety Officer	108	106	106
	Child Safety Support Officer	20	21	20
	Total	128	127	126
Brisbane South & Gold Coast Zone	Child Safety Officer	75	77	78
	Child Safety Support Officer	19	11	14
	Total	94	88	92
Central Zone	Child Safety Officer	67	69	76
	Child Safety Support Officer	20	24	22
	Total	87	93	98
Far Northern Zone	Child Safety Officer	32	34	31
	Child Safety Support Officer	13	17	21
	Total	45	51	52
Ipswich and Western Zone	Child Safety Officer	47	60	68
	Child Safety Support Officer	10	17	18
	Total	57	77	86
Logan and Brisbane West Zone	Child Safety Officer	64	66	59
	Child Safety Support Officer	13	11	16
	Total	77	77	75
Northern Zone	Child Safety Officer	42	59	64
	Child Safety Support Officer	9	13	12
	Total	51	72	76
All Zones	Child Safety Officer	435	471	482
	Child Safety Support Officer	104	114	123
	Total	539	585	605

Like other agencies, the Department of Child Safety has a number of vacancies. Like other agencies, it is difficult to recruit suitable staff in rural and remote areas.

As I have previously advised the Member for Currumbin, the Government also has a plan to boost recruitment and retention in areas where this has previously proven difficult.

I am pleased to once again advise that our rural and remote incentive scheme is producing positive results, with a 50 per cent reduction in separations in areas covered by the program.

This is good news in terms of child safety service centre stability, and good news for children and families who come into contact with the Department.

We currently have a total of 73 unfilled vacant (recurrently funded) CSO and CSSO positions across 49 child safety service centres in our seven zones and zonal offices and 233 vacant positions (incorporates all funding types) that are being temporarily filled.

These numbers do not, however, necessarily reflect our true vacancies for several reasons. Firstly, the flow-on effect of a single staff member vacating a position may result in a number of other staff undertaking relieving opportunities which will be counted as multiple vacancies. While actually permanent employees, they will be recorded as having a temporary engagement.

In addition, the budgeted salary from vacant positions can be offset for other important positions created over establishment to undertake important or urgent service delivery tasks.

Similarly, the level of temporary staff also needs to be understood in context. Our workforce is significantly younger than the public service average and we have a high proportion of female₂

employees, two factors that make our workforce highly mobile. Thus temporary status may be in fact be a preference for many of our staff.

On my direction, the Department so far this year has converted more than 400 suitable temporary staff to permanent.

Staff are our most important asset and we will continue to develop programs and initiatives to ensure they are valued and supported.

I am committed to my staff and to the children of Queensland, I am proud of the work my staff do and the ongoing recruitment and retention of passionate and qualified CSOs and CSSOs remains a high priority.

Unfilled vacant positions by zone is set out in the table below:

ZONE		Unfilled Vacant Positions		
		2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Brisbane North and Sunshine Coast Zone	Child Safety Officer	12	6	
	Child Safety Support Officer	0	4	
	Total	12	10	
Brisbane South & Gold Coast Zone	Child Safety Officer	7	6	
	Child Safety Support Officer	3	5	
	Total	10	11	
Central Zone	Child Safety Officer	15	17	
	Child Safety Support Officer	2	4	
	Total	17	21	
Far Northern Zone	Child Safety Officer	14	12	
	Child Safety Support Officer	5	3	
	Total	19	15	
Ipswich and Western Zone	Child Safety Officer	10	9	
	Child Safety Support Officer	0	2	
	Total	10	11	
Logan and Brisbane West Zone	Child Safety Officer	27	5	
	Child Safety Support Officer	1	5	
	Total	28	10	
Northern Zone	Child Safety Officer	7	6	
	Child Safety Support Officer	3	2	
	Total	10	8	
All Zones	Child Safety Officer	92	61	
	Child Safety Support Officer	14	25	
	Total	106	86	

