

**Question on Notice
No. 578
Asked on Thursday, 17 April 2008.**

MR PHIL WEIGHTMAN MP, Member for Cleveland asked the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women (MRS KEECH) -

QUESTION:

Will she advise how the Government is assisting Queensland's most vulnerable children through support of the Foster Care system?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question and for his strong and continuing interest in Queensland's most vulnerable children and the important role foster carers play in improving outcomes for these children.

Sadly, over 6,500 children are unable to live with their families as a result of suffering abuse or neglect or because they are at significant risk of suffering abuse or neglect. When children and young people in these circumstances cannot live with their families, the children are placed in out-of-home care. One type of out-of-home care is being placed with foster and kinship carers.

The Bligh Government is committed to building an effective foster care system by expanding the range of strategies to recruit, retain, support and value our foster and kinship carers. The number of Queensland children in need of the Department of Child Safety's protection continues to grow.

That's why the Bligh Government has invested \$15 million over the next five years to help recruit and support foster and kinship carers, so that we can give vulnerable children in need of our help the best possible start in life.

The campaign's objective is to attract 500 new carers.

When parents are unable, or unwilling, to provide these things, the Department of Child Safety steps in. Our dedicated and professional staff do all they can to protect these children and keep them safe. Their jobs would be impossible without the heart and soul of the child protection system – our foster and kinship carers.

It's not always an easy job, but as many of our carers will tell you, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing a frightened child grow into a happy, healthy adult and knowing that it was thanks to you.

The children are the innocent victims and they deserve the same opportunities as every child born in this state – to be loved, cared for and supported and to live in a safe place free from violence, abuse and neglect .

They deserve the same access to health care, education and to the basic necessities of life so many of us take for granted – food, shelter, clothing and, above all, love and affection.

We're looking for people of all ages, from all walks of life all over the state to open their hearts and homes and give our vulnerable kids a helping hand.

Whether it's for a few years, a few months or even just a few days any help is welcome. It doesn't take much to make a difference, and providing weekend, support or emergency care can have a major positive impact on a child in need.

On behalf of the Bligh Government, I encourage all Members of Parliament to take up the challenge in their electorates and help us boost the number of caring Queenslanders lending our kids a helping hand.

The Department of Child Safety has developed a range of initiatives and projects to meet its commitment to foster and kinship carers through the Foster and Kinship Carer Strategy. These include:

- allocating resources to assist newly approved and existing carers to access ongoing support and training from their local child safety service centre and funded non-government organisations to help them in the crucial role of caring for our state's most vulnerable children and young people;
- recognition of the valuable work of carers through the annual Foster Care Excellence Awards which are held in March each year;
- improved case planning processes to enable children to access support placements to provide much needed breaks for carers and new experiences for children in care;
- implementation of the Foster and Kinship Carer Support Line which provides after-hours support to carers seeking advice and assistance in response to managing complex care issues. Carers are also able to access 24 hour support and advice from the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre;
- implementation of the Evolve Interagency Services program to provide therapeutic support to respond to the needs of children in out-of-home care and to support their carers;
- significant enhancement of carer allowances, including an annual Consumer Price Index adjustment in January 2008; and
- simplification of the application process for becoming a carer.