

Question on Notice

No. 1640

Asked on Thursday, 29 October 2009

MS STONE ASKED THE MINISTER FOR CHILD SAFETY AND MINISTER FOR SPORT (MR REEVES)—

Will the Minister given an update on positive improvements to child safety services?

ANSWER:

Over the past five years, this Government has implemented all of the recommendations from the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) inquiry and continued to make positive improvements to the lives of children and young people.

These improvements include more than tripling the operating budget from six years ago to a record budget of \$638 million in 2009–10; doubling staffing levels from 1,217 full-time equivalents in 2004 to the current budgeted level of 2,428; and supporting the employment of nearly 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs in Queensland through strong partnerships with the non-government sector.

Since 2004–05, the Queensland Government has increased funding to non-government organisations by almost \$209 million to \$332 million in 2009–10. This is an increase of 270 per cent in these five years alone.

Placement funding has seen the largest increase since the Government's response to the CMC inquiry with an annual recurrent increase of \$25.3 million each year or more than \$100 million over four years. This will enable expansion of the range and mix of placements to reduce reliance on short-term or emergency placements.

Substantial funding is provided to non-government organisations to deliver services for abused and/or neglected children and their families and contributes to the employment of some 1,400 equivalent positions.

Approximately \$4.9 million has been allocated to the Evolve Program to establish additional services in Brisbane South, Ipswich, Toowoomba and Cairns, thereby ensuring more children in care who have been traumatised from abuse can access help, including those placed in new therapeutic residential services.

The Bligh Government also recognises the benefits of early intervention and prevention. In 2009–10, approximately \$16 million has been allocated to Family Intervention Services to help 1,700 Queensland families keep their children safely at home or have their children return home.

One Chance at Childhood, established in 2008 with \$12 million over four years, aims to put the needs of children first and give babies and toddlers some stability in their young lives by establishing clear case planning goals that avoid situations where young children drift from foster care to their parents and back to foster care. Specialist staff have been employed across a range of program areas to work with children and their families and 555 children aged under four years have been referred to the program.

Dedicated foster and kinship carers are the backbone of the child protection system and improve our capacity to match children with carers and reduce the number of placements for

each child. The Bligh Government allocated \$15 million over five years to recruit, train and support new foster carers.

The Foster and Kinship Carer Recruitment Campaign launched in May 2008 has been a success with over 1,000 new carers approved as at 3 November 2009. This response by the community will assist in providing care and support to vulnerable children and young people at risk.

The Bligh Government is also addressing the issue of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system. Annual funding for Indigenous organisations known as Recognised Entities has increased by 450% since 2004. Approximately \$16 million is provided to fund 30 Recognised Entities that provide cultural advice and actively participate in significant decision making to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the statutory system receive the best possible service outcomes.

The Bligh Government has allocated \$45.6 million over four years for the establishment of 11 safe houses in Indigenous communities which will deliver supervised residential care services and enable children and young people to remain in their communities while their longer term needs are assessed.

The Department of Communities also recently established the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Safety Taskforce which held its inaugural meeting on 7 October 2009. The taskforce will provide advice and strategic direction on addressing the over-representation of Indigenous children and their families in the child protection system.

The child safety system is evolving and the Bligh Government will continue to build on these foundations by exploring new ideas and initiatives. For example, in the Beenleigh, Logan and Goodna areas, the department is funding a pilot transition from care program for young people aged 15 to 17 years who are preparing to leave out-of-home care. The program provides practical assistance in areas such as life skills and self-care, increasing access to employment and facilitating access to information and options on future housing, health and income support.