

**Division 71: Child Protection, \$306 000 000 —**

Mrs J. Hughes, Chairman.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for the Environment representing the Minister for Child Protection.

Mr T. Murphy, Director General.

Ms J.A. McGrath, Acting Executive Director, Corporate and Business Services.

Ms J. Waylen, Director, Non Government Policy and Funding.

Ms C.J. Barnett, Acting Executive Director, Metropolitan Services.

Mr B. Mooney, Acting Executive Director, Country Services.

**The CHAIRMAN:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published by 9.00 am tomorrow.

The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. This is the prime focus of the committee. Although there is scope for members to examine many matters, questions need to be clearly related to a page number, item, program, or amount within the volumes. For example, members are free to pursue performance indicators that are included in the budget statements while there remains a clear link between the questions and the estimates. It is the intention of the Chairman to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. For the purpose of following up the provision of this information, I ask the minister to clearly indicate to the committee which supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by 6 June 2008 so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers, and, accordingly, I ask the minister to cooperate with those requirements.

I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office. Only supplementary information that the minister agrees to provide will be sought by 6 June 2008.

It will also greatly assist if when referring to the program statements volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, item, program and amount in preface to their question.

I call the member for Murdoch.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to the third dot point under "Significant Issues and Trends" on page 1133 of the *Budget Statements*. The dot point indicates that 2 655 children were in the chief executive officer's care as at 30 June 2007. What types of things does "chief executive officer's care" entail? I presume it includes foster care and other related matters.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Murdoch for his question. When a child is placed in the care of the CEO of the department, it means that the welfare of the child is under the director general's responsibility. The child may be placed with a foster carer or a family carer. A child, for example, may also be placed in the care of a grandparent or significant other family member, or the child may be placed in a particular facility operated by either the department or a non-government organisation.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to the first dot point on page 1134, again under "Significant Issues and Trends". The phrase "children involved in child protection cases" is used. I presume that "CEO's care" is a subset of the other figure. Does this figure refer to the number of children known to the department?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to respond to that question.

**Mr T. Murphy:** The phrase "known to the department" is not one that we use because it is pretty vague and could encompass any child client; for example, a child who comes to the department with his parents, who are seeking financial assistance. The phrase "involved in child protection cases" refers to cases currently under investigation or for which a notification has been received and a determination has been made whether to investigate further.

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**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I refer to the table of key efficiency indicators on page 1139 and the line concerning the proportion of investigations with an outcome recorded within 30 days. The government anticipated an actual increase in this efficiency of 37 per cent for 2006-07, and the budget figure for 2007-08 was 40 per cent. Indicators have actually fallen by 34 per cent this year. It is anticipated that the extra caseworkers to be employed in 2008-09 will increase the rate of completion, and the department will again aim for a 40 per cent efficiency rate. I understand that since March 2007, 200 extra caseworkers have joined the department. How will the department ensure that this efficiency indicator will not continue to fall by 10 per cent, as it has in the past year? The government proposes to employ more caseworkers. Last year the government employed 288 extra caseworkers and still could not meet its own efficiency indicator target of 40 per cent. Exactly how many extra caseworkers will the government need to meet its target, given that it is anticipated that there will be a 16 per cent increase in child protection cases over the next 12 months?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is a very detailed question, and I am sure that the director general will be able to provide a very detailed answer!

[7.10 pm]

**Mr T. Murphy:** I thank the minister. Last year there was an unanticipated increase in the number of children coming into care—something in the order of, as the member said, 16 per cent. At the same time, we had a significant increase in staff, but not all staff came on at the same time. Recruitment takes some time, and most staff come to the department without experience. They first need basic or start-up training, which delays the time it takes for them to actually take on cases and be responsible for investigations. However, more to the point, they cannot take as many cases as an experienced case officer. Additionally, 12 months ago our cases were capped at 15 per case officer, and inexperienced case officers take fewer than that; it takes time to work up to that caseload. In broad terms it is fair to say that the previous increases brought us up to a level at which, if the number of children stayed stable and with cases capped at 15 per case officer, we could reach those efficiency indicators. However, the number of children being investigated continues to grow and so last year we were still catching up. We are very confident that with the increase in case officers this year, which will be in the order of 150, we will meet that efficiency indicator. The only other point I would make is that 40 per cent is obviously a long way off 100 per cent, which indicates that the more complex the case the longer it takes to resolve. It is a feature that the cases we are investigating now have more complicating factors year-by-year, whether that is drug and alcohol, mental health or the broad dysfunction within families.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** I refer to the thirteenth dot point under “Major Achievements For 2007-08” on page 1140 of the *Budget Statements*, which states —

Developed a decision-making wall chart for workers in non-government services when they are concerned that a child is being abused or neglected.

What is the process for workers in both government and non-government services when they come across concerns that a child may not be attending school; that is, truanting? Is it departmental policy to automatically refer that information to the Department of Education and Training for it to follow up? Does that wall chart include information about truancy and what action should be taken? If I can further broaden my question: when cases come to the attention of government sector workers in the Department for Child Protection, do those people automatically refer those cases to the education department to alert it to concerns about truancy?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Bassendean for the question. I think the member is referring to the wall chart I am holding, which is about what to do when people are concerned that a child is being abused or neglected. This wall chart was developed by the department in conjunction with the Western Australian Council of Social Service to assist people in non-government services when they are concerned that a child is being abused or neglected. If the member looks at this resource, he will see that it, if we like, assists non-government services in determining the best course of action. It describes everyone’s broad role in protecting children, what to do when services have concerns and the process of making a referral to the Department for Child Protection when required; it also provides contact details. I ask the director general to outline what happens in that process when departments, other than the Department for Child Protection—and the member cited the Department of Education and Training—are involved.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** I am also interested in the Department for Child Protection’s policy for referring children may be truanting. Are those cases automatically referred?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The director general will be able to provide further details.

**Mr T. Murphy:** Truancy is an issue that the Department of Education and Training and the Department for Child Protection share responsibility for. If a child does not attend school on an infrequent basis and there are no indications of dysfunction in the family or other serious indicators, such as offending behaviour, we would

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expect the education department to address those issues through its own student support services. However, if there are signs of significant dysfunction for the child and its family or if offending is a significant issue, we would expect the Department of Education and Training to refer that child and family to the Department for Child Protection. We would assess the family situation and provide support or intervention as appropriate. The reality on the ground for a lot of families is that children may attend school intermittently. We engage with the family to try to provide support and remediation. At the same time, student support services work with the child to help keep him at school. That is the bulk of the story.

**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** I guess my concern is in practical terms. There are some dysfunctional families in my electorate and I am concerned that the children may not be attending school, a fact that may not even be known to the education department. These children may, in fact, not even be registered at a particular school; therefore, these kids are outside the system entirely. I am concerned that the only agency dealing with them is the Department for Child Protection and that if it does not alert the education department to concerns about truancy, the education department will not know. I would have thought that if children who attend school intermittently or who have changed schools come to the attention of the Department for Child Protection, it might be good policy as a matter of course to refer them to the Department of Education and Training. Is that happening?

**Mr T. Murphy:** Absolutely. I am sorry if I missed that aspect of the member's question. We would expect our case officers to advise the Department of Education and Training of those circumstances—absolutely.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I think this is also important: one of the programs the government has been rolling out into various parts of the state, including parts of the metropolitan area, the Peel region and, I understand, the Kimberley, is the responsible parenting initiative. It is a government-funded initiative that seeks to engage parents to work with not only the Department for Child Protection, but also other important support services to address some of the issues that children or young people may present with. It is an initiative that I have personal experience with in the Peel region and it is having a very important impact in supporting families who have children who may be at risk. That is certainly so for those who may be truanting or at risk of other inappropriate behaviour, including potential justice-related issues. That program is very important and is also a referral point.

**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** My concern is that some of the children in my electorate are missing out on perhaps the only thing that gives them consistent routine in their lives—their only point of normalcy is the school environment. Some of these children do not even seem to be engaged in school; therefore, I think it needs to be a priority. That was more of a statement than a question, so I will move on.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to the line item “The proportion of children in CEOs care who are safe from abuse by caregivers” under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” on page 1136 of the *Budget Statements*. The 2008-09 target is 100 per cent and the actual figure for 2006-07 was 99.7 per cent. Is that 99.7 per cent of the 2 655 children in care, so that it was, in effect, only the smallest number of children who were abused by caregivers in the previous financial year? How many children were abused by their caregivers?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The actual number of children in the chief executive officer's care who were abused in 2006-07 by a carer was 10.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** That measure is of children abused by caregivers. Is there any measure of children in the chief executive officer's care who suicided, self-harmed or were abused by persons other than the caregiver, such as other children, relatives or associates of the caregiver? Are figures of that nature kept?

[7.20 pm]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to respond.

**Mr T. Murphy:** We have those figures, and we employ a fairly broad definition of potential abuse in care, even to the extent that anything other than a minor accident is investigated according to our abuse in care procedures. We have those figures, but we do not have them at hand.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I ask that the information be provided by way of supplementary information.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I ask the minister to outline what information will be provided through supplementary information.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will provide the committee with a breakdown of the circumstances regarding the number of children in the CEO's care who were abused in the 2006-07 year.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** By other than the caregiver.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes. It is probably important to note that the measure also includes cases in which the person believed responsible is a worker at a placement service where the child was placed. Therefore, that would also be included in that figure.

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**The CHAIRMAN:** Is the member for Murdoch happy with that?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Thank you.

*[Supplementary Information No B40.]*

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Also at page 1136 under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” is the line item “Improved safety — resubstantiation rate within 12 months after a substantiation” and beneath that the line item, “Improved safety — substantiation rate within 12 months after a decision not to substantiate”. I have read the explanation for those line items, but I am still somewhat confused about them. Is it the case that it is a measure of instances in which a complaint is made but not investigated and within 12 months another complaint is made? Is that the nature of the measure?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The indicator is a proportion of the children who were the subject of a child maltreatment substantiation during the previous financial year and who were not also the subject of a subsequent child maltreatment substantiation within the next 12 months. The indicator suggests the extent to which child protection interventions were successful in preventing further harm to children. I am not sure whether the director general would like to add to that.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** If he could, because I have also read that explanation and I still do not get it.

**Mr T. Murphy:** I will try to break it down. If there is an allegation of abuse in a family and it is substantiated, we take whatever protective action is appropriate, including perhaps removing a child from the family—not necessarily all the children—or leaving the child in the family. We would expect no further abuse to occur in that family because we have intervened and so on. However, in five per cent of cases, the difference between 95 per cent and 100 per cent, further abuse has occurred and has been substantiated.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** That is the measure that has the small “c” after it. Is the measure with the small “d” after it a different measure?

**Mr T. Murphy:** The first measure is when an allegation of abuse has been substantiated and then further substantiated abuse occurs. The second measure is when there has been an allegation, but it has not been substantiated. We have looked at a case and thought that severe abuse was probably not occurring, but that abuse was substantiated in the subsequent 12 months. That could be a reflection of the evidence available or the particular circumstance of those cases.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I now understand what information those two measures are providing. Why is it not a preferable key performance indicator to have a measure showing the number of children in the CEO’s care who had died, had serious bodily harm done to them or suffered some other form of harm and track that from year by year? Why is it not more obvious to have children involved in child protection cases in a yearly time period who died or to whom GBH or other forms of nominated harm was done and track that from year to year? Is that a matter that has been considered subsequent to the Ford review?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to respond.

**Mr T. Murphy:** I seek some clarification. Is the member referring to tracking of the occurrence of similar levels of harm?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** The problem that appears to have developed in the past five or six years in child protection relates to children whom I would term as “known to the department” but for whom the measure is “involved in child protection cases” have died. That seems to be one of the cutting-edge problems that has developed. Why is it that deaths of children involved in child protection cases who have had GBH or other forms of nominated harm done to them are not tracked from year to year? I would expect that the measure of the department’s ongoing success would be that children in the CEO’s care who have died, suicided, had self-harm done or have been harmed by caregivers or other people of particular categories is on the decrease. Could the same type of measure be employed for children involved in child protection cases?

**Mr T. Murphy:** It is a reasonable proposition. I will make a couple of points. The number of those type of cases or incidents to which the member refers is very small. Every death is considered for investigation by the Child Death Review Committee. The criteria for that is not solely children in the care of the CEO; it is deaths of those children for whom a notification of concern of abuse has been received in the past two years or where there is a pattern of contact with the department. That gets to the notion of “known to the department” in a significant way. The number of cases in which that has occurred to somebody in the care of the CEO is very small. In my experience in the past eight months that I have been in this position, I remember one case, and that involved a woman who was hit by a bus. To that extent I would not be confident it is a meaningful indicator. The current indicator collects abuse in care by a caregiver, and that would include any children who are left in the family but

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who are subject to a supervision order by our department. To that extent it picks up instances when a child has come to our notice but the child remains in the family. I think we have those issues covered in different ways. We track the number of deaths and we can make that information available, but, again, I would not be confident that it is a significant indicator from year to year.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** For instance, would the department have information that would inform me of the number of children involved in child protection cases in 2005-06 who had been the subject of a substantiated sexual abuse or assault claim, and the same figure for the following two years?

**Mr T. Murphy:** Yes. I am informed that some of those figures are considered nationally, but they require great caution because every jurisdiction at this time defines cases differently and is subject to a severe time lag.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** I refer to the first dot point at page 1138, which refers to the commencement of development of a therapeutic support model for children and young people in residential care. Would the minister elaborate on the detail of this initiative and explain what is meant by a secure, closed therapeutic facility? What sort of kids does it treat and how are they treated?

[7.30 pm]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Bassendean for his question. The development of a therapeutic support model for children and young people in residential care has involved the training of all metropolitan residential care officers in therapeutic crisis intervention, including planning for the conversion of the Kath French Centre into a secure, closed therapeutic facility. The department has provided therapeutic crisis intervention training to all metropolitan residential care staff; the department is rolling out therapeutic crisis intervention training to all country hostels; and the department has commenced the development of a therapeutic model of care for the residential facilities. A site inspection has been undertaken of the Kath French Centre, and processes are in place for the development of the interim secure facility. Alternative accommodation for the current residents is being explored. The important thing about this initiative is, of course, that this particular facility is very specific in terms of the young people whom it is focused on assisting and supporting. It is based on a similar model in Victoria. When I was the minister responsible for this portfolio, I visited the facility in Victoria on which the Kath French Centre will be modelled. From my experience, having viewed that centre, and having spoken to a number of the young people who are in that centre and also to the staff, it is a very effective model. It is a model that provides a safe environment for young people, who can be quite damaged as a result of their circumstances, and that also provides the appropriate support services, including therapeutic services, to those young people. This is a very important initiative by government.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** I am seeking some clarification of what is meant by “a secure, closed therapeutic facility”. That could mean anything from a place that is safe for children, to images of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. What are we talking about here?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** It is a secure facility. It is facility that is locked, essentially.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** Locked to keep kids in, or to keep others out?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Certainly to provide a safe environment for the young people.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** So to keep others out?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, and then to ensure that those young people are in a safe place, where their needs, particularly their ongoing needs of a therapeutic nature, can be met.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** What age are we talking about, and what particular needs are these children likely to have?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The children and young people who are in these particular facilities are certainly the most disadvantaged, and they most probably have complex social, emotional and mental issues that they are dealing with. Sometimes there is the potential that these children or young people will self-harm. By providing a safe environment for these children, a number of their issues and particular needs can be addressed. However, they will need to be in a place that is secure. In this case, for these small number of children and young people, that will be a locked facility.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** They will be locked in?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is right. The director general may be able to give an indication of the age range and the needs, which is the question that the member asked.

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**Mr T. Murphy:** The key issues are, as the minister has indicated, that a child may be at risk of causing serious harm to himself or herself or to other people. The planning for this unit has been very well considered. It is based on a model in Victoria that has been operating for some time. Admission will be for only 21 days, with the possibility of only one 21-day extension. It is not designed to just lock up dangerous children for a long time and say that is the solution to their problem. It is designed to take young people who are in severe need, and to stop the world around them and what they are doing so that we can restore normalcy and their connections to reasonable accommodation, and perhaps also to education, mental health services, drug and alcohol services and the like. Obviously, legislation will need to be introduced—it has not been considered as yet—to deal with this matter. We are looking at teenagers rather than very young children, and although it is worth considering children as young as 10—which has been the experience in Victoria—it is a far more likely to be middle and older teenagers.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** The director general has said that legislation will be introduced. Is that because these will be compulsory placements? Are we talking about mental health and issues such as that?

**Mr T. Murphy:** At the moment, the state has the power to put people in locked facilities under the Mental Health Act or under the criminal justice provisions. Neither of those necessarily suits a secure welfare situation. These children and young people are not necessarily mentally ill, although many of them will have mental health issues. They also will not necessarily be placed in a secure facility due to their offending behaviour, although most of them will have a history of some offending behaviour. It really is determined by those key criteria of being young people at risk of causing serious harm to themselves or other people, and being young people who are amenable to having services wrapped around them if we can just hold them still for long enough.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** I understand. The director general also made reference to legislative changes.

**Mr T. Murphy:** Yes. Any placement of a person in a confined circumstance and a secure facility requires legislative capacity—whether that is imposed administratively or by a judicial arrangement.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I refer to page 1140. The fifth dot point under the heading “Major Achievements For 2007-08” states —

Successfully implemented Phase One of the Department’s new Information Technology system (ASSIST).

Has this program replaced the program that has been used by the department for many years to record client details; and, if so, what is this new system, and what details will be recorded on that system?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale for his question. The ASSIST project centres on the replacement of the Department for Child Protection’s core information systems. I think that answers the first part of the member’s question. It is a significant investment going back to 2002, when \$22 million over eight years was appropriated for this project. After the Ford report, which was adopted by government last year, the scope of the project was adjusted to focus on child protection, of course. The first phase of ASSIST has been successfully implemented. It includes the introduction of the objective electronic document and records management system. This system is used primarily for records management at this stage. The second stage of ASSIST supports planning for, and the collection of, critical information about children and young people in care. The system has been implemented, and field workers are currently being trained progressively, according to a geographic rollout timetable. The design stage of the third phase of ASSIST, which will provide full case management capacity across the state, is nearing completion. There has been a very comprehensive overhaul of the way the department records and ultimately utilises data that is collected on children and young people in care, and of course it is a critical management tool for workers throughout the department at all levels.

[7.40 pm]

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I refer the minister to the first bullet point on page 1141, which states —

In conjunction with the Commonwealth Government, introduce income management where children are at risk of neglect, commencing in the East Kimberley and South East metropolitan regions.

My interest is twofold, as the south east metropolitan region incorporates part of my electorate and will be included in the pilot program. Will the minister give me an outline of what that will look like on the ground? This program will obviously require pretty close cooperation between the state and federal governments, but how will it operate for that family that is having its income managed? How will it operate for that person on the ground; will the minister paint me a bit of a picture?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Victoria Park for his question. This is obviously a very important area, and as the member is aware and has already highlighted, representatives from the Department for

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Child Protection, Centrelink and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs have been collaborating closely for a number of months on the staged implementation of what is called compulsory income management. This is being implemented as a child protection measure in WA. This new measure will be used in cases in which neglect is a concern. The interventions will commence in July this year, and, as the member has already highlighted, the rollout will include the Cannington district, which includes his electorate, and also the east Kimberley, followed by the west Kimberley, in the first instance.

The basic nuts and bolts of this program are as follows: DCP and Centrelink staff will hold regular reviews to ensure the intervention is improving the situation for children and not causing unintended negative consequences. People identified for income management will be provided with access to financial counselling and support from Centrelink, if the family is not already receiving that service. This, of course, is aimed at assisting with and resolving immediate financial difficulties, or reducing financial stress that that family may be experiencing. Additional to this is the Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008, which allows parenting orders to be imposed, and compulsory income management, as a child protection measure, is also part of that process. As the member is asking what it will look like on the ground for a family that may be involved in this program, I will ask the director general to give the member an example.

**Mr T. Murphy:** The specific procedures are still being finalised with FaHCSIA and Centrelink, but we have attempted to build a model that is very simple; namely, when a family comes to our attention in which there is severe neglect, such as children not being fed or going without shoes—obvious signs that the money is being misspent—the Department for Child Protection will get involved with that family and look to what supports and so forth might be necessary and available. This will allow us to also notify Centrelink that, in our opinion, the family's social security funds are not being used responsibly. Centrelink then can quarantine up to 70 per cent of those funds. Centrelink would pay directly utilities, rent and the like, and the rest —

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Did the adviser say that Centrelink will pay those bills directly?

**Mr T. Murphy:** Yes, things such as utilities and rent. The remainder of the money would be provided to the family in the form of an electronic card, which can be used at a range of outlets but only on food, clothing and essentials; not alcohol, cigarettes and so on. Each person subject to that measure will be case-managed by the department. Centrelink will ensure that people get financial counselling so that they can learn to budget and manage their money better, and at the same time the department will provide whatever supports are necessary, including, as the minister indicated, responsible parenting lessons, if that is the most appropriate service for them.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I have a further question. Through the minister; I think this program has the prospect of being very, very successful and very important, but the case management between two levels of government—federal and state—is causing me a bit of concern, particularly for that not-terribly-sophisticated person in the east Kimberley who has not had access to state government facilities in any event, let alone federal government facilities. Will those families still have access to what it is they need to have access to as a result of that money being quarantined? It will be managed by the state, I would have thought, sensibly; is it able to react so quickly?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will firstly add that I think we can be very successful with this program; it is a very important one. It is aimed at ensuring that the important needs of children in families at risk are given the best possible chance to be delivered—that is, food, clothing and of course an appropriate home environment that has power and water and all those services connected and delivered. I am very confident that this program can be delivered. My understanding of the program also is, of course, that the connection between DCP and Centrelink staff, as one example, is critical to the success of this. The proposal is that the department and Centrelink staff will hold regular reviews to ensure that the intervention is actually improving the situation and circumstances of the child or children that it is focused on. I am sure that with this measure, we will see far greater positive outcomes for the children we are targeting.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** I am encouraged by the program the minister has described. My question is a simple one: for how long will it be a trial program; and, if it is successful, how soon can it be rolled out to the north east metropolitan region, where my electorate is?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Obviously this initiative will be very closely monitored by the department and, ultimately, I am sure, by the minister responsible. It is an initiative that is aimed at ensuring children remain the key focus, and it is child-centred. Of course it is also, as the director general mentioned in his earlier answer, focused on building, or wrapping around, supports to a family so that the intervention is aimed at not only delivering food and clothing to the child or children but also, of course, supporting the families by improving their capacity to budget appropriately and to provide improved nutritional meals, for example. The Minister for Child Protection will be watching the rollout of this very closely, and will certainly look at how it can be refined

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and rolled out to other areas where there is a need. Being aware of the member's electorate and being aware of the issues that he raises regularly, I am sure that the member's area can be looked at as a potential priority in the future as well.

[7.50 pm]

**The CHAIRMAN:** I will exercise my option while we are on this subject to ask a question from the chair. My question is in relation to withholding finance and so forth through Centrelink. I will use the example of grandparents raising their grandchildren. These grandparents are not open to receive foster care payments or anything like that. Is there opportunity at least for grandparents to have money that is going to the parent for the children to also be quarantined for the use of the child while that child is in the care of grandparents? Has any thought at least been given to being able to compensate grandparents in that way, considering they are not considered to be foster carers?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to respond.

**Mr T. Murphy:** This is an issue that successive governments have been grappling with for some time. The commonwealth legislation does not provide for the transfer of funds on a compulsory basis from the direct family through to the grandparent. What we have available to us, though, is a voluntary scheme between the family and Centrelink, where some of those funds can be transferred to the grandparent; however, this has to be with the agreement of the family. Particularly in Aboriginal communities in which there is perhaps stronger recognition of reciprocal responsibilities in those circumstances, fortunately we have been quite successful at enacting a number of those arrangements. If provisions are finalised through our negotiations with the commonwealth to establish the procedure and so on that provide more leverage in those circumstances, I undertake to provide those at a later date when they are finalised.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That would be excellent. Obviously they are not finalised now, so I would be happy for the minister to liaise with me rather than by way of supplementary information.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Just to clarify: will we be able to provide that as supplementary information at this time?

**Mr T. Murphy:** No, because we are still finalising it.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Madam Chair, I think it would be more appropriate if the question was taken on notice, which would allow, when that information is available, for the answer to be provided.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That sounds like a good idea. I thank the minister.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer the minister to the final dot point on page 1133 that refers to the fact 2 655 children are in the chief executive officer's care. It is noted in that paragraph that that represents a 20 per cent increase on the previous year. I have several related questions. What explains that increase? Does the minister have a figure for the children involved in child protection cases, which is another broad measure? Has there been a similar increment in that figure over the previous year? With respect to both figures, what number are Indigenous children?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The figures shown on the page that the member quoted from show an expected increase of 16 per cent in 2007-08. This number has been steadily increasing over several years. In June 2002, for example, there were 1 772 children in the care of the CEO, but, by June 2007, there were some 2 655 children. The increase has occurred in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, but the increase has been particularly greater for Indigenous children. As of the end of April 2008, there are 2 961 children in care; of those, 1 236 are Indigenous children. It is important that the committee understands this trend in children coming into the care of the CEO is a national, and in fact an international, trend. I am sure we will all agree that it is a very sad state of affairs when we have so many children that need to come into the care of the CEO.

Some of the reasons for such expected increases, and increases we have already experienced, include the fact that this government introduced new legislation in 2004, and subsequent amended legislation, that ensured that there was greater capacity to capture children who previously were not identified as being in need of, and ultimately, coming into the care of the state or the CEO, such as enhanced community awareness. The expectation for the protection of children and the focus on child abuse in Indigenous communities is why this government, in its term in office, has invested a record amount of appropriation in protecting children. It is a fact that since the election of the Gallop government in 2001, and then the subsequent Carpenter government, some \$700 million has been invested directly into child protection and protection of children in support of families—in the past three years, nearly half a billion dollars of that figure has been allocated. That is a significant investment in ensuring that we protect children. It demonstrates the Carpenter government's absolute commitment to children as a priority, and it is a record that we are very proud of in terms of focussing on appropriating in a

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budget a great deal of money protecting children. I am sure we would all agree in this place that the sad thing is that there are a number of families in our communities who, for all sorts of reasons, are dysfunctional or not functioning appropriately to provide protective and effective environments for children. Those children who cannot be protected are the ones who end up of course potentially under the protection of the CEO.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** My question related to the numbers involved in child protection cases as at April.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to answer that specific question.

**Mr T. Murphy:** I can give the member the quarterly figures. They are probably most useful in indicating the trends, and, of course, a number of cases do carry forward from quarter to quarter. In the quarter April to June 2006, there were 1 698 child protection cases; that is, notifications, investigations and applications for care and protection. That increased in the April to June quarter of 2007 to 2 021. It is around a 16 per cent increase for that period.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Does the minister have the figures for Indigenous children amongst those figures?

[8.00 pm]

**Mr T. Murphy:** Indigenous children make up a very similar proportion to those in care. The proportion of Indigenous children in care, as indicated, is 42 per cent. It is a little lower in the overall number of cases, which is around 40 per cent.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** This is not a quiz, but does the minister know how many Indigenous children there are in the state?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** No, but I am very happy to source that information and provide it to the member as supplementary information; that is, the number of Indigenous children in the state as at —

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** As at April 2007.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, as at April 2007.

[*Supplementary Information No B41.*]

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to the delivery of service line item on page 1133. I am interested to know how much money is paid to the SafeCare program and what it is.

[Mr A.P. O’Gorman took the chair.]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** SafeCare has three service agreements with the Department for Child Protection to 30 September 2009. SafeCare’s total annual funding level is \$259 349 for the provision of the families program, the young people’s program and the Bunbury program.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** What is the families program?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The families program focuses on adult perpetrators who are not permitted to live at the family home for a period of at least a year or to have unsupervised contact with their children during that time. The program focuses on perpetrators and their families.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Is the department aware of any concerns or have any concerns been raised by department employees about the families program?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general whether he is able to respond.

**Mr T. Murphy:** Although no specific concerns have been brought to my attention—I would expect any significant concern to be brought to my attention—a program of this nature will always be somewhat contentious. As no program operates with a 100 per cent success rate, some risks will always have to be monitored and addressed by our staff. I expect that there would be a good deal of conversation about the effectiveness of this service and how it is operating at any one time, and for that to be on occasion the subject of criticism at a local level. However, I reiterate that if there are concerns, I would expect them to be brought to my attention.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I understand that part of the families program involves the perpetrator acknowledging past offending and that that is part of a contract with the perpetrator. Is the director general aware of any reports to police that have resulted from acknowledgements by perpetrators of past offending?

**Mr T. Murphy:** SafeCare’s funding agreement with the department requires it to notify us and/or the police immediately there is any imminent or significant risk to a child, or if safety cannot be assured or any abuse has reoccurred. We are uncompromising that if there is any risk, we and the police are notified. However, to address the member’s question, if through the course of therapy a perpetrator discloses behaviour that has not previously

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been brought to the attention of police or is not the specific behaviour that was the subject of a substantiated allegation of abuse by our department, we would not expect that to be brought to the fore. In the same way, the progress of people who undergo therapy for sexual offences in the prisons program, which progress is represented by their disclosing more behaviour, is not brought to the attention of the authorities for further prosecution. That would defeat the purpose of the program, which is to increase the safety of children.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Have there been any notifications of the type that the director general has just described?

**Mr T. Murphy:** During my period of tenure, none of those has been brought to my attention. However, I ask that we take that question on notice and provide any information that is available.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can the minister please detail the supplementary information that he will provide?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, I will provide information on —

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** SafeCare's families program, and notably whether there have been any notifications to the director general of children being at risk by the possible actions of individuals engaged in the SafeCare program.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide that information as enunciated by the member.

[*Supplementary Information No B42.*]

**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** The second dot point on page 1141 states —

Undertake a project on information sharing between agencies with relevant Government and non-government agencies. This will encompass legislative requirements to develop procedures for the disclosure of information.

One of the difficulties that I have had with working to address problems of dysfunctional families in my electorate has been the inability of Homeswest, DCP, the police and juvenile justice to talk to each other. I am encouraged by what has been alluded to. Can the minister tell us in greater detail what sort of information sharing we are talking about and between whom? What legislative changes will be made to allow this to happen?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** This is a very important issue. If more information can be shared appropriately between departments, it will allow greater opportunities for intervention and assistance for children and families. The department is undertaking an information-sharing project with relevant government and non-government agencies aimed at improving the exchange of appropriate case-specific information. Of course, the exchange of that information must always be focused on ensuring the safety and welfare of children. An interagency reference group has been established to oversee some key areas. The first area is to develop a set of procedures that relate to section 23 of the Children and Community Services Act, which provides that the chief executive officer must establish procedures for the disclosure of information under a subsection. Another aim of the reference group is to develop an education program on the exchange of information for the Department of Health and professional colleges. That relates to recommendation 66 of the Ford report. The group is also responsible for the revision of professional development for Department for Child Protection and district office staff, particularly for caseworkers. Again, that relates to recommendation 67 of the Ford report. The reference group is also focused on developing a training package for use by agencies for training their staff on processes and issues of privacy, confidentiality and appropriate information sharing with the department. Privacy and confidentiality issues are important considerations in this area. Finally, the reference group has been charged with revising the interagency guidelines on information sharing between the department and other agencies. The aim of this is to ensure that appropriate information can be shared between agencies or departments that have a role or responsibility in a child's welfare. This mechanism will allow for a greater and smoother process and will assist ultimately in the health and wellbeing of the child.

[8.10 pm]

**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** Although privacy issues are obviously important, is the exchange of information that the minister is talking about simply between the Department for Child Protection to other agencies or is it between other agencies to DCP? The police, Homeswest and other agencies have often needed to share information with DCP and have often been prohibited from sharing information that, in my opinion, would have been in the best interests of the child. Are we talking about freeing up the sharing of information so that all government agencies will have access to shared information? How will it work in practice?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** This project was initiated by the department because it considers this to be an important part of its role in protecting the welfare of children. One of the benefits of the process that the department is undertaking is that other agencies will benefit from this work. Indeed, if there is a need within another agency, it can examine its protocols and procedures within that jurisdiction. This is a department-focused initiative regarding its responsibility and relationship with other agencies and departments. However, there will be mutual benefits for all.

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**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** Presumably legislative changes would enable other departments to pass on information to the department.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** In this case the department is responsible to its act, which is predominantly the Children and Community Services Act. The director general informs me that it is not always the case that legislative amendments are required for information to be shared.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** The thirteenth dot point on page 1140 of the *Budget Statements* reads —

Developed a decision-making wall chart for workers in non-government services when they are concerned that a child is being abused or neglected.

What information is on the chart?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** A question was asked previously about this.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I apologise.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I refer to the last dot point on page 1137 of the *Budget Statements*. I would like some information on how many places there are at the Halls Creek Hostel for children aged between naught to five and six to 15. What are the demographics? Are they all Aboriginal children and young people? Are any long-term measures in place for the children from the hostel after they reach the age of 16? Are they returned to their previous situation? Are any plans in place to provide ongoing programs for those children?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for his question. The Halls Creek Hostel caters for two age groups. The hostel has an eight-bed capacity for children aged between naught to six years, which has been operational since September 2007, and the hostel also caters for children aged from 15 to 16 years old. That has been operational since 13 May 2008 and has a full capacity of 12 beds. However, it is planned that the hostel will take only four children initially and will increase that number when the skill level and experience of the staff increases. The hostels employ 22 full-time equivalents. Importantly, 17 of the staff are Indigenous workers. That is very important for delivery of quality services to those children.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Are all the children Aboriginal?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, all the children are Indigenous. The member asked what happens to the children who are older than 15. Other services are delivered by the department and other non-government agencies in the region that might be targeted towards assisting and supporting children and young people who might not be staying or who have stayed at the hostel but who require services and support. I ask the director general to comment on that final part of the question.

**Mr T. Murphy:** We hope and anticipate that children who live in the hostel at that age have had a good start in life; that is, they will have been to school, will have a good chance of gaining employment or are continuing education through TAFE. The cut-off point of 15 years marks the transition to independent living, which is consistent with the circumstances of the child's family and community. It is perhaps worth noting a related initiative from the federal government to establish a hostel for young people undergoing training or employment in the Kimberley. That would be an excellent transition for those young people.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** What is the cost of running the hostel? Obviously only four beds are being occupied and that number will increase. What are the time lines for and cost of that? Presumably, the hostel is new infrastructure because it was built on a greenfields site. I might have missed something earlier because I have not attended the whole session but there was a cost to build that. Is the cost factored into the budget?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I assume that it is under the capital works section of the budget. We will quickly try to ascertain the figures. I refer the member to the capital works program on page 1144 of the *Budget Statements*. The bottom third of the table provides figures for the appropriation for the Halls Creek hostels. The member may not be aware that part of it includes the refurbishment of an existing building. Obviously the building required refurbishment to make it appropriate to cater for these numbers of children. There are two figures in the expenditure for the 2007-08 budget relating to the costs of setting up the hostel. The figure for recurrent costs is \$2.3 million a year.

[8.20 pm]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Is that the cost of running the hostel whether there are four kids or 16 kids there?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, basically.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I refer to the first dot point under "Major Initiatives For 2008-09" on page 1140 of the *Budget Statements*, which refers to the implementation of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse across Western Australia. There has already been some discussion on the focus of a lot of expenditure in the Kimberley

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as a result of disclosures that have emerged, particularly over the past 12 months, about sexual abuse in that region. I give the example of the Protective Behaviours program—I am aware of it in my electorate. Sexual abuse has become almost a normalised behaviour in some areas. What programs are in place to ensure that children are in a position in which they feel they can disclose that sort of behaviour?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to respond to the question.

**Mr T. Murphy:** There is certainly an education program called Protective Behaviours being rolled out through the Kimberley, largely by the Department of Education and Training. Police also have some responsibility for the delivery of that program and occasionally people are brought in from outside to deliver it. That is one strategy. I have to admit that this is a larger issue that reflects decades of gestation. The dysfunction in some of those communities manifests in abuse of the non-powerful or weak by the powerful. All the feedback we have had on Protective Behaviours is that it is having a positive effect, particularly on young teenagers, who are much better equipped to identify situations in which they are being exploited. We need a range of strategies, delivered by all government agencies working with communities, to address the overall dysfunction that manifests in sexual abuse or exploitation of younger and weaker people.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to the resubstantiation rate measurement on page 1136. I now understand what it measures. Is it fair to say that from year to year investigations undertaken by the department are overwhelmingly, in percentage terms, investigations of completely new complaints by completely new children?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to respond.

**Mr T. Murphy:** Certainly substantially, if not overwhelmingly, yes. It is the case that there are some families in which protective action has been taken, new relationships form, new children are born and the pattern of abuse reoccurs. There may be an investigation into the same family, but it would not be reflected in the resubstantiation.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** What the director general said reflects one of my levels of unease with this measurement. It may even be the case that the child in some regards might be safest during the 12 months after an investigation, because the family has come into contact with the authorities. I am concerned about this as an ongoing measure to benefit children in general, and to track the department's overall performance over a five or seven-year period. Is this a new measurement? I have looked through previous *Budget Statements* and I could not see any measurements of this nature.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am informed that this measurement is part of a suite of national measures. It is not unique to Western Australia; it is a measurement that is utilised across the nation. It has also been used for some time. It is not a new measurement.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I refer to the first dot point under "Major Achievements For 2007-08" on page 1138. It relates to the development of a therapeutic support model for children and young people in residential care, and residential care officers in therapeutic crisis intervention. How many places have been created? What is the need for a centre such as this? Is there any plan to expand the number of places?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** A similar question to this was asked previously; the member was not here earlier. This model is being developed and will be implemented over the coming financial year. It is basically the conversion of what is known as the Kath French Centre—the member may be aware of the centre—in the hills. It will be converted into a secure closed therapeutic facility. The facility will provide support for those children and young people who have particularly complex and potentially difficult-to-manage behaviours. Many of them will be children who have complex issues impacting on their lives. They may be dealing with mental health issues or potential self-harm, or they may have a propensity towards violence and either self-harm or harm against others. This model is closely modelled on a facility that exists in Victoria. The expectation is that it will provide accommodation for eight males and eight females at full capacity. It is expected that young people will be in this facility for up to only 21 days, with the possibility for an extension of time depending on the circumstances of the particular young people. Of course, while a young person is at the facility, a range of wraparound services, including therapeutic services, aimed at stabilising that young person would be provided. Once that young person's circumstances had stabilised, other options for that young person would be delivered in other facilities or other care-type situations. That is the aim and the broad focus of what that facility will provide for those children and young people who are considered in need of this service.

[8.30 pm]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** This centre is planned but it is not operational. When does the Department for Child Protection expect it to happen?

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**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. The Kath French Centre exists but obviously some modification to its current structure is needed. It is certainly the intention of the minister and the department for this service to be up and running as soon as practicable, given the demand. I ask the director general whether there is an approximate expectation.

**Mr T. Murphy:** As indicated in the answer to the previous question, it is subject to legislation being passed in Parliament. If that occurs, we plan for the centre to be operational in the last quarter of the financial year.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** What is the nature of the legislation that must be passed for this centre to be operational?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** It would be through an amendment to the Children and Community Services Act 2004.

**Mr J.B. D’ORAZIO:** I refer to the seventh dot point under “Major Achievements For 2007-08” on page 1142 of the *Budget Statements*, which states —

Expanded the Best Beginnings program to Cannington and Kwinana.

I also refer to the second dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” on page 1143 of the *Budget Statements*, which states —

Expand the Best Beginnings program to an additional two sites in the Kimberley.

What exactly is the Best Beginnings program? More importantly, how were the sites of Cannington, Kwinana and the Kimberley chosen—being nowhere to be seen in the eastern corridor?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. The Best Beginnings program is an early intervention home visiting service that is provided to families and their newborn children; therefore, the focus is obviously on newborns coming into a family.

**Mr J.B. D’ORAZIO:** Is this program for families the department thinks are at risk of problems?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That would be part of the overall criteria, if we like. The Best Beginnings program aims to foster healthy attachment and bonding between mothers and infants, and between parents and the community. It commenced as a pilot project in 2000, I understand, and the service has grown from two pilot sites in Albany and Midland to 10 service sites. Those 10 sites include the addition of services in Armadale, Fremantle, Mirrabooka, which I think would be in the member’s electorate —

**Mr J.B. D’ORAZIO:** Close.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Close—maybe in the member’s new electorate.

**Mr J.B. D’ORAZIO:** Closer, closer!

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** What new electorate?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Service sites are also located in Joondalup, Perth, Kalgoorlie, and most recently, Cannington and Kwinana. Clearly, the Best Beginnings program has been delivered in those areas that statistically have large numbers of newborns and in which statistical data supports the need for such support services in those areas.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I refer to “The proportion of placements of Indigenous children made in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Child Placement Principle” line item listed under outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 1136 of the *Budget Statements*. What is that principle?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. This indicator captures compliance with the principle by examining the placements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on a particular census date. The principle is the placement of Indigenous children with Indigenous carers and identified on a particular census date. That is the principle and how that figure was arrived at.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Are the vast majority of Indigenous children who are placed outside their family placed with other Indigenous families?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is correct.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to “The average number of placements per child in the CEOs care per year” line item listed under outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 1136 of the *Budget Statements*. Correct me if I am wrong, but that appears to be a measure of a child’s movement between placements in a calendar year. Does the 1.5 figure mean that children move three times within a two-year period?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I ask the director general to clarify that figure.

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**Mr T. Murphy:** I cannot see how the member deduced that children would move three times on average. The average number of placements is 1.4; therefore, some children do not move at all and other children move twice and so on until the average of 1.4 placements is reached.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I understand that, but what does 0.4 of a placement mean in a calendar year?

**Mr T. Murphy:** An easy example would be to consider that almost every second child has two placements.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Does the Department for Child Protection keep statistics that show the average length of a placement in terms of days, weeks or months?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The department has those figures.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Do we know off-hand the average length of a stay or placement?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide by way of supplementary information the average length of stay for a child in care in relation to placements.

*[Supplementary Information No B43.]*

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** How long must a child stay in care before the Department for Child Protection might consider adoption as an option for the child?

[8.40 pm]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for an interesting and important question. Obviously, the particular circumstances of children in the care of the CEO varies. The circumstances that may lead to adoption becoming an issue would vary for each child. I understand that the department does not set an average time or benchmark for eligibility for adoption.

We would need to look at the specific circumstances of the child, and they are influenced by a range of factors, including the child's natural birth parent or parents. The adoption laws of this state provide for the birth parent to have a substantial say. If the child is in the care of the CEO, other implications arise in regard to the current legislation. The department does not have a benchmark that determines that once a certain time or length of stay has been reached that child becomes eligible or is determined to be eligible for adoption.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Were there any adoptions of children either in the CEO's care or the subject of an investigation in the previous financial year? Were there any adoptions of children who previously had been in the CEO's care or who met the other criteria of being involved in child protection cases in the previous financial year?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide that information by way of supplementary information. I am sure that members are aware that the number of children who become available for adoption in Western Australia and throughout Australia is very low, both among children who are placed for adoption voluntarily by their birth parents and children who may become available for adoption through other factors. It would be better to provide the actual statistical information through supplementary information. I wanted to make that point about adoptions and I know the member is aware of the low number of children who become available for adoption in this state.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would the minister indicate what information he is providing?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The number of children in the CEO's care who became eligible for adoption in the past financial year.

*[Supplementary Information No B44.]*

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** The answer to my next question will more than likely need to be provided by way of supplementary information. I am interested to have information on the length of stay for the top five children in the CEO's care; in other words, the longest five stays on the department's books at the moment.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** In terms of length of time?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Correct.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The director general informs me it will be 18 years.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** For all five?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I understand that to be the case. We will check it and provide the information.

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**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I will reframe the question: Would the minister provide the number of children who have been in the CEO's care for 18 years?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide that information as supplementary information.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** My previous question would need to be rephrased, because the answer would be zero. I will ask for records for the number of children who have in the past five years been in the CEO's care at the time they reached 18 years? It could be several placements.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We need to be clear about the information that will be provided.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I will go back to my original question; that is, would the minister provide information on the top five length of stays for children on the department's books at the moment?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** We will provide the circumstances of the top five length of stays for children under the care of the CEO.

[*Supplementary Information No B45.*]

**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** I refer to the ninth dot point at page 1138 under "Major Achievements For 2007-08", which refers to children in foster care and the fourth dot point under "Major Initiatives For 2008-09", which refers to care options available for children in the CEO's care. The minister is probably not aware, but the majority of children in either foster care or in the care of the state in the United States are on psychotropic medication and there is an emerging concern that it is used as a method of managing behavioural problems rather than dealing with the real needs of the kids. Many of the kids have had troubled backgrounds and have suffered trauma. Are statistics kept for the number of children in the care of the state who are on psychotropic medication? If so, what do they indicate; and, if not, why are they not kept?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The information I have is that specific data would be very difficult to monitor and collect, given that a child at any one time may, for various periods, be taking medication for a number of reasons, but not necessarily for extended periods. Information like that may appear in the care plans of the particular children who are in care, but my understanding is that the department does not specifically keep a running data record of the specific drug that the member mentioned.

**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** It is a class of drugs—psychotropic drugs. A range of conditions are treated with psychotropic medication, including anything from attention deficit disorder to depression to bipolar disorder. The concern that is emerging in the US is that these drugs are being used as a means of modifying the behaviour of children in foster and state care. There is increasing empirical evidence to back up anecdotal evidence that it is used as a measure of behavioural control. Is information available, either formal or informal, on the situation in Western Australia? Anecdotally, concerns have been raised about that same issue.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I have answered the first part of the question. The best way to deal with the question is for the member's concern to be noted. It is certainly an issue that can perhaps be taken up directly with the minister, and I am sure the minister would welcome an approach by the member on this issue.

[8.50 pm]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I want to revisit page 1138, and the dot point at the top of the page, which is one of the dot points under the heading "Major Achievements For 2007-08" at page 1137. The minister has referred to legislative changes that will be required for the operation of the Kath French Centre. Is the reason for those legislative changes the fact that the child will be placed involuntarily in a secure and closed therapeutic facility? Am I on the money in saying that?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The member is right on the money—yes, exactly.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I refer to page 1149 and the heading "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies". I refer in particular to the family crisis program. I think I know what that program is. In the 2008-09 budget estimate, the funding for that program is just shy of \$2 million. However, in the out years, the funding does not change; it remains the same. If this is the program that I think it is, I have a suspicion that the demand will probably be increasing as opposed to remaining static. Can the minister provide some commentary on why the funding has remained at the same level?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Victoria Park for his question. I will ask Mr Mooney to respond.

**Mr B. MOONEY:** The family crisis program is a financial assistance program for families or individuals who are facing unforeseen crises. It may be used for the provision of emergency food —

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Accommodation?

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**Mr B. Mooney:** It may sometimes be emergency accommodation, particularly for victims of domestic violence. It includes short-term relocation expenses.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Yes. That is what I thought it was.

**Mr B. Mooney:** That is only one part of the family crisis program, but yes, that is right. The member also asked about the demand for that program. I do not have any information to hand at the moment about the trends and the demand for that program.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to page 1135. Under the heading “Total Cost of Services”, there is a line item “Less Income”. The amount of income listed for that item is quite substantial. How is that income generated by the department?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** These amounts are predominantly commonwealth grants, or moneys that have come in from fees and charges. It may also include moneys under the supported accommodation and assistance program.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Are they tied grants?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I understand that some of them are. SAAP is an example of a tied grant.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to page 1139 and the heading “Key Efficiency Indicators”. One of the items under that heading is “The proportion of investigations with an outcome recorded within 30 days”. Is the minister able to provide the average length of time from the commencement of an investigation to when an outcome is recorded?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** We dealt with a question relating to this item earlier in the evening. The director general has indicated that we will need to take that question on notice in order to provide the member with an accurate answer. I am happy to provide, as supplementary information, the average number of days between the commencement of the report and the investigation. Is that correct?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** No—between the commencement of the investigation and the outcome of the investigation, if that is the appropriate measure.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** We will provide that as supplementary information.

*[Supplementary Information No B46.]*

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I refer again to page 1149. I want to ask a follow-up question about the family crisis program. This is a program that in my electorate I am regularly trying to access for my constituents. I note that the advice was that the minister does not have with him any information about the future expectations of demand for those resources. Could I be provided, by way of supplementary information, with some information about the future expectations of demand for that program, if that information is available?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes. The figure that appears in the forward estimates is based upon the experience over a period of years. The department has been operating within the bounds of the figure that is shown in the *Budget Statements*. I think the member’s question and his earlier comments relate to the trend that may be expected in the future with families in need, and whether that trend will be upwards.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** That is right.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** This is an area that the department is obviously responsive to. The current figures relate to the call on the department for this program on a year-to-year basis. If that call increases, I am sure that will be brought to the attention of the minister.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I refer to page 1138. The fourth dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” states —

Increase the number and range of accommodation and care options available to children in the CEO’s care.

This question has, I suppose, a regional or country flavour. What changes have been made to increase the number of regional accommodation places and care options as part of this initiative?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Roe for the question. The government has provided \$77.8 million over the next four years for an extra 128 beds across Western Australia for young people who have experienced multiple placement breakdowns and for whom other care settings are not appropriate. The additional beds will be provided in partnership with the non-government sector and will comprise 26 four-bed group homes across districts, and three eight-bed hostels in the Pilbara and Kimberley districts, commencing in 2008-09. It also includes 56 treatment-specific beds in the metropolitan area. The 128 beds across Western Australia include a significant number of beds in rural and regional Western Australia.

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**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** How many beds was it in the Kimberley and Pilbara districts?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** In the Pilbara and Kimberley districts, there will be three eight-bed hostels.

[Mrs J. Hughes took the Chair.]

[9.00 pm]

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** On page 1140, under the heading of “Major Achievements For 2007-08”, the seventh dot point refers to —

Undertook pool recruitment process for caseworkers. This included a number of strategies/exemptions to attract and retain graduates and experienced workers, and to streamline recruitment practices.

Minister, it must be very difficult for very young graduates to deal with some of the incredibly confronting and challenging situations that they have to deal with, so there must be a tremendous advantage in getting people with life experience. What exemptions are offered to those with life experience to work as caseworkers; and what controls are in place to ensure appropriate standards are maintained?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the very important question. As the member is well aware, the massive increase in staffing numbers that have been delivered to the department over the last seven years of this government has been quite remarkable. The department has focused on a range of initiatives in last year’s and this year’s budget for the attraction of staff. It has obviously targeted new young officers who will be attracted to the department, and there will be also new staff who have the variety of experiences and qualifications that the department is looking for who are also attracted into the department.

New workers coming into the department who will be working with children and families will obviously, first of all, receive the start-up training to ensure that they have the initial basic training, additional to their experience and expertise they already bring to the department. They then start their intensive work with families and children on a much reduced caseload. Also, because of the massive increase of new positions that have been delivered to the department, there is a capacity for the department to provide ongoing mentoring for new staff members as well, through senior caseworkers and team leaders that are in place as well. Of course, the overall monitoring of that is done by the regional managers, or managers of a particular district.

The member is right; it can be a daunting experience for new workers or somebody who may be a recent graduate, but because we have injected so many more resources into the department and supported the department staff, new recruits—both older and younger—will now be supported by the department effectively, and will be trained effectively to ensure that they can work effectively with the children and the families they will be given in their caseload. It, again, underpins the massive injection of funding that this government has contributed to this portfolio over the last seven years.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** Is it possible for the minister or one of his advisers to detail specific examples of what the exemptions are to attract staff?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Exemptions in terms of —

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** The seventh dot on page 1140 makes reference to a range of strategies and exemptions to recruit caseworkers; what sort of exemptions are offered specifically?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I ask the director general to provide that background.

**Mr T. Murphy:** The exemption from established human resource practice allows us to run pool recruitments on an open basis rather than advertising for individual positions or even continually advertising and holding a pool for a limited period. Employment to the department is open. Anyone, at any time, can approach us, put forward their application, be considered on their merits and be appointed accordingly without necessarily going through a competitive process or a time-limited process.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** This question flows from my previous question. I refer to the bullet point directly below the one the member for Bassendean referred to. The bullet point relates to remote area positions that are obviously going to be important in the upcoming years with the implementation of mandatory reporting. I assume some of those exemptions and strategies are particularly focused on filling those remote area positions?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy for the director general to provide a response.

**Mr T. Murphy:** They were a particular challenge; I refer to recruiting workers for towns like Oombulgurri, Balgo, Kalumburu, Bidadanga, Dampier Peninsula to a slightly lesser extent, and Jigalong, which are the remote Aboriginal communities in which we have child protection workers working in conjunction with police.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Sorry to interrupt, but are they all areas where there are multi —

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**Mr T. Murphy:** Multifunctional police services—that is right. We are there and the police service is there. This is a reasonably new development since the Gordon inquiry was initiated by the government. We were able to have those positions open to headhunting on a permanent basis; that is how we recruit. We advertise periodically here and interstate, but that is less successful than headhunting those positions through every means available and determining people’s suitability on an individual basis. That includes their exposure to the community and the community supporting their coming, which is essential if they are going to be successful in that community.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before we go on, I remind members that we have been on child protection for two hours and five minutes. We have one more division with services 1, 2, 3 and 4. We still have one member on the notice board for a question. Do we want to move on after the final question, or do we want to continue with child protection?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I have one more question.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I have another question as well.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Fine. Members are happy to continue. I wanted to make sure. Member for Murdoch.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer the minister to the second dot point on page 1140 which deals with the specialist child interviewing unit. I am interested to know whether there is a backlog or waiting list of children requiring an interview by that unit; and also what is the average waiting time for a child to be interviewed by that unit?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The answer is none and zero.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I refer the minister to the eighth dot point on page 1138 which commences “Registered 70 new foster carers”. This is another question from a regional perspective. Do those places include regional areas; and, if so, how many?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That figure does include regional areas. The breakdown of that number I cannot provide to the member tonight, but I can assure him that it includes foster carers from throughout the state.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I wonder whether the minister would provide me with that breakdown on notice.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide a breakdown of the 70 regional and metropolitan carers who have been recruited, as identified on page 1138.

[*Supplementary Information No B47.*]

[9.10 pm]

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I have a question that I think relates to page 1135. I refer to the “Total Cost of Services” line item. Were any payments made to families or children in the last financial year by way of compensation or ex gratia payments consequent upon actions of members of the department?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The director general informs me that payments have been made to some individuals in care. However, to ensure that the member gets an appropriate and specific answer, I am happy to provide supplementary information.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Just to ensure that the supplementary information is correct, minister, what will you provide?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I want to know whether any payments have been made by way of compensation or ex gratia payments to children or families by the department in the last financial year.

[*Supplementary Information No B48.*]

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I refer to the final dot point on page 1133 which states that 2 655 children were in the chief executive officer’s care. Are any records kept of children in the CEO’s care for the last financial year who went missing, in the nature of running away and being unaccountable for periods of time?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am informed that we do not have a definitive recording of an overall figure of what the member is asking. It is important to note that if a child absconds whilst under the care of the CEO or a facility, the police are informed within 30 minutes of that child absconding. This demonstrates the complexity of circumstances that some children may be in. A child may abscond from a foster care home for a short period and be relocated but it may not necessarily be recorded as that child running away and then registered in a database under that statistic. Again, it is not practicable to record that.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I can accept that that is the case if it is recorded on a file-by-file basis.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** What is the average time that we need to wait for supplementary information?

**The CHAIRMAN:** They have to be returned to the committee clerk by 6 June.

**Extract from *Hansard***

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**The appropriation was recommended.**