

CHARTER OF RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

Statement by Minister for Community Development

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for Community Development) [12.09 pm]: I inform the house that a Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care has been finalised. The charter is a tool to ensure that the rights of children and young people in care are protected. Key themes include the right of children to safety, health care, education, privacy, respect, religion, and help, as well as to have input into their care plans and the right to be heard. Plain, straightforward language has been used in the charter to help children understand their rights. To effectively target different age groups, the charter has been produced in posters, brochures and as a business card sized booklet, and is available at www.community.wa.gov.au. The charter is being distributed to all children in care in Western Australia, which totals about 2 200.

The charter makes clear that rights also confer reciprocal responsibilities. For example, the right to be respected states that children and young people must also treat others with respect. Similarly, the right to have one's views heard is directly linked to an obligation to listen to other people's opinions. The development of the charter has resulted in one of the largest statewide consultations ever conducted with children in care, involving large and diverse numbers of children and young people in care. This process had input from the Care for Children and Young People Advisory Committee, the CREATE Foundation, which comprises children and young people in care, and youth representatives. The Office for Children and Youth and other Department for Community Development staff helped to manage the process.

I place on record my congratulations to those involved; the contributions have been fantastic and worthwhile. Some people are cynical about promoting human rights, facilitating equal opportunities and addressing discrimination. I am not among the cynics. Children who come into the care of the chief executive officer of DCD are among the most disadvantaged in our community. By clearly communicating to every child in care that they have rights, we create for them, their carers, government departments and community services the expectation that we will act on those rights. We are encouraging these children and young people to stand up for their rights and to accept the accompanying responsibilities.

The charter is an outcome from the Carpenter government's Children and Community Services Act 2004. It is an example of how this government has modernised the legal framework for the care and protection of children. I now table material on the charter for the information of members.

[See paper 2228.]