

Chairman; Mr David Templeman; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Tony O'Gorman; Mr Albert Jacob;  
Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Ian Britza; Mr Bill Johnston

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**Division 61: Child Protection, \$331 309 000 —**

Mr J.M. Francis, Chairman.

Dr G.G. Jacobs, Minister for Water representing the Minister for Child Protection.

Mr T.M. Murphy, Director General.

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

Ms F.J. Lander, Executive Director, Policy and Learning.

Ms J. Waylen, Director, Non-government Policy and Funding.

Mr J.C. Hancock, Executive Director.

Ms A.F. Stewart, Policy Adviser, Office of the Minister for Water.

**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 Friday, 5 June 2009, 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 the 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 Friday, 5 June 2009. It will also greatly assist Hansard 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.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Mandurah.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I refer to the three per cent efficiency dividend cuts that are listed on page 780 of the budget papers. My first question relates to the cessation of the allocation of funding for funeral assistance, which I understand equates to cutting \$2.975 million over the forward estimates. I note in the Department for Child Protection's annual report that 341 people accessed this program in 2007-08 and 423 people used it in the previous year. Is it now the intention of the state government to no longer provide any financial assistance for funerals?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I thank the member for Mandurah for his question. I thank everyone who is in attendance tonight, after a very long day, and for their participation in the budget estimates.

I understand the member's question and that the Department for Child Protection was set up to protect children and support individuals and families who are at risk. It is very difficult to provide all services for all families. Although in the past funeral assistance was considered to be an important aspect, it was not a direct core business of the Department for Child Protection. The department operates a financial assistance program and it has had to meet the government's three per cent efficiency dividend. All I can say is that the department is exploring options with the Public Trustee, through the financial assistance program, to request some financial assistance as a result of having paid for a funeral and to help people who are experiencing difficulties in meeting their daily living expenses. The government's current position is that the department will cease the specific category of financial assistance for funeral expenses as at 30 June. The saving from this service is estimated to be, as can be seen, \$725 000, plus one full-time equivalent staff member. A communications strategy has been

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developed to notify the relevant government and non-government organisations. As I said, negotiations are in train with the Public Trustee about the burial of unclaimed bodies.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the minister for his answer. The concern I have is that this service was provided to people at a time when they were experiencing a great tragedy. I have seen people in my electorate experience that type of tragedy, particularly Indigenous families. A major tragedy occurred in my electorate just over a year ago involving a number of children and young people who were killed in a car accident. There are other similar examples. I counter the minister's assertion that the provision of this service is not the core business of the department. This service is very important to people at a great time of tragedy in their lives when they have just lost a loved one. Almost 100 per cent of them are experiencing financial difficulties or are impacted on by poverty-related circumstances. The last thing they need is to not know where the financial support will come from to bury their loved one or loved ones. I would like to know, as a further question: where does the government, having cut this service, expect these people to get financial assistance from at that time of tragedy, to the extent that was previously delivered by this service? My understanding is that the service provided significant dollars to cover a large part of the cost of a funeral. Where does the government expect these people to go to now? If the non-government service is expected to provide the dollars or the support, where in the budget papers has the government made provision for that additional resource to be delivered by the non-government sector to provide the service that has now been cut by the minister's government?

[7.10 pm]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I thank the member for Mandurah. I understand that this is a very difficult situation and I empathise with the people who find themselves in this situation. In answer to the member's question, the financial assistance is provided through the bereavement allowance and payment that are available to eligible recipients through the commonwealth support payments through Centrelink. That is a commonwealth-funded program. There is also the financial assistance program. The department assures me that it will continue to assess clients who request financial assistance as a result of having paid for a funeral and are experiencing difficulties. It is a difficult call, and I did not want to seem harsh when I said that it is not the core business of the department. There is a constellation of things that the Department for Child Protection has to do, and there is a choice between funeral assistance and supporting children and young people in the chief executive officer's care or protecting children and young people from abuse or supporting individual families at risk or in crisis. There is a myriad of support concerns, and I have these in other portfolios, but I must make a call. It is a difficult call, but all the competing interests are balanced up with the special arrangements in the financial assistance program for specific difficulties. We are not trying to shunt it off to another jurisdiction, but there is some provision for bereavement payments for people in the community. I understand that it is a difficult call.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I know that the minister is a compassionate person. The concern I have is that we are talking about families who lose loved ones. I have seen in my electorate the tragedy that some families experience, and they will not now have the option of at least knowing that the government is there to provide a basic service, which is the burial of a loved one. I saw it in my electorate a year or so ago, and it is happening far too commonly in many areas. Families need that support, and need to know that it is there. In my community there was a rallying around. The department provided funds for the burial of these children, and other people in this case, and the community also rallied around. The government, through the department, was right there at the start. It will not be there now, and I think that if we are looking for a three per cent efficiency dividend, this should be the last place that we would go to do that. I know that these issues are difficult, but if the minister is talking about transferring responsibility and the capacity to the non-government sector, which we already know is overburdened, these families will have nowhere left to go. That is an appalling situation to place very vulnerable people in. Where else can these funds be delivered, and has funding been transferred to the non-government sector to provide this assistance? It is very badly needed. It is not as though people are applying for this benefit in their thousands. The numbers in the past couple of years have been in the hundreds.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I understand the member's concern and I can feel his compassion over this issue. All I can say is that it is now not automatically available, as was the case previously. Assistance is still available for those in dire need. I can only reiterate what I said before about the bereavement allowance alternatives. The financial assistance program of the department will continue to assess clients who are in dire need. I will refer to the director general for some anecdotal evidence.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** This is not a decision that was recommended lightly. It is a real service that was used by people. However, in determining that the service would be ceased, we reviewed with our staff how it was being used by families. Only today, we were talking in Geraldton to an Aboriginal staff member who said "Gosh, what are the families going to do now?" As we talked it through, that staff member said that the family would whip around and put the money together itself, but that might leave it short of tucker for a couple of weeks. Fine—they can come to us if they are short of tucker. It is no bad thing that families whip around and pay for their own

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funerals, and that they use the commonwealth bereavement allowance, to which they are entitled. We can guarantee that we will leave no family high and dry. We will leave no bodies unclaimed. However, this is a reordering of how they access the money.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I refer to page 786 of the *Budget Statements*. The third paragraph under the heading "Asset Investment Program" reads —

Major information, communication and technology projects include: the continuing provision of infrastructure to support the development and operation of the case management program ... the introduction of systems in support of the Department's reform program and government initiatives such as mandatory reporting.

How many mandatory reports have been received since the implementation of mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse on 1 January 2009? How many of these reports have been received from each mandated professional group? Does the minister consider the system is working effectively in protecting children and young people in Western Australia?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse by teachers, doctors, nurses, midwives and police officers commenced in January 2009. The member for Darling Range was a member of Parliament when the legislation passed. To provide a bit of background, \$68 million has been allocated over four years, including \$43.9 million for the Department for Child Protection, to implement mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse. There has been a 22 per cent increase in child protection notifications, and an 84 per cent increase in child sexual abuse notifications. A total of 382 mandatory reports had been received between 1 January this year, when the legislation came into force, and 31 March, with 93 received in January, 133 in February and 156 in March. Of the 382 reports received up to 31 March 2009—that figure, it should be noted, includes multiple reports and reports on matters already under assessment—97 were made by doctors, 35 by nurses, 186 by police and 64 by teachers or school principals. There has been a good uptake of reporting across all the professional groups, particularly by doctors, both private and public, across Western Australia, which demonstrates the positive uptake. I must say that I, as a previous practitioner, and colleagues close to me who worked in the area had some actual concerns about whether mandatory reporting would increase the load on the system, and that if it was inadequately resourced, it would be counterproductive. We must commend the previous government for this as well, in that resources have been provided so that we have an effective mandatory reporting system.

[7.20 pm]

Eighty-five per cent of the initial reports were made in written form, confirming that the targeted education and training for mandatory reporting has been successful. Training in that is ongoing, obviously, and well established, and telephone support and consultation are provided. The mandatory reporting service, which has been established, received 293 inquiries on top of the 382 mandatory reports for that period from January to 31 March 2009. I think I have covered most of the members' questions. The member asked whether I consider that the system is working effectively in protecting children. Yes, it appears that it is working effectively. It has probably addressed some of the misgivings and concerns that perhaps we might have had when we were sitting opposite.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I refer to the second dot point on page 781, which refers to the following —

The number of children in the CEOs care has continued to increase since 30 June 2008. There were 3,011 children in care at 30 June 2008, representing a 13 per cent increase on the previous year.

Does the minister expect the number to rise at that level—that is, above 10 per cent?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** There were 3 011 children in the CEO's care as of June 2008. This has increased to 3 187, a 5.8 per cent increase over those nine months. The department estimates that by 30 June this year, 3 312 children will be in the CEO's care, which is a 10 per cent increase for the year. By way of a bit of background, the expected 12-month increase in the number of children in care to 30 June this year is significantly lower than the 30 per cent increase over the 12 months to 30 June 2008. There was a 21 per cent increase over 12 months to 30 June 2007. The proportion of children in care who are Indigenous continues to increase, with 44 per cent of children in care as of 31 March this year being Indigenous, compared with 38 per cent at the same time in June 2006. In June 2007 and June 2008, 41 per cent of children in care were Indigenous.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** The increase has been continuing. When does the minister expect the increase to taper off; and, if it does not taper off, what is he doing in the community to try to prevent that continuing increase?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** It is hard to know whether those figures will taper off. My feeling is that they perhaps will; however, I refer that question to the director general for his impression of where that is going.

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**Mr T.M. Murphy:** We are seeing the rate of growth decrease significantly. Ten per cent is even a high-end estimate of what we will end up with this year. I think we are dealing with a backlog of children who could have been taken into care over recent years. But with the reform of the department and with an increase in resourcing, we are catching up. I think that will slow growth. The other thing that we are confident will slow growth, but will and should take time, is the way we do child protection work. We have introduced what we call the signs of safety child protection practice framework, which involves an uncompromising approach to the safety of children. It also brings in the family as part of the assessment and planning process, as well as the extended family and other agencies, all of which can, together, build safety around that child if there is a possibility of doing so. This framework has been introduced in some counties in the USA—for example, in Homestead County in the USA over nine years, which is an extended period—and the number of children in care has halved, but the number of families with which the department is working has tripled. That is the sort of effect we are looking for with the introduction of this approach.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I refer to note 1 on page 785, which is relevant to this particular dot point. The only additional money that seems to have been put into this service, which deals with prevention and early intervention before families break down and before children need to go into care, is money from the federal government's national partnership agreement on homelessness. Where is the Barnett government's investment in the additional FTEs and prevention?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Which item is the member referring to?

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I am referring to the dot point I spoke to earlier and to the relevant note, note 1, on page 785. Where is the additional money from the Barnett government, or is this just another expense that the government is pushing onto the feds?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** The advice I have received is that the department's budget will increase in 2009-10 by \$30 million, or 8.7 per cent, and it will provide, among other things, nine child protection staff to be co-located with WA Police in country areas for domestic violence intake; \$9.096 million under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness commonwealth funding, service 3; \$1.2 million increased funding for the hardship utility grant scheme for tariff increases and financial counselling; and \$1.1 million for the responsible parenting full-year rollout.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** My question relates to the foster care partnership and foster care recruitment campaign, which are referred to in the seventh dot point on page 781. Can the minister please explain how the foster care partnerships work and the success of the campaign to date?

[7.30 pm]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I thank the member for Ocean Reef for the question. The foster care partnership model concentrates on not only the core relationship of the foster family with the child, but also the department's relationship with the foster family. That is very important and is obviously centred on the child. It is a critical role for the foster family team, which not only involves placing the child in the foster family, but also refers to what occurs before the child is placed—that is, assessment, planning and review, and provision of information to the carers.

Under foster care placement care and support, contact visits, which are important between the child and its birth family, must be managed in such a manner as to support the foster placement management and the fostering partnership. On the subject of diversity and equity, carers are provided with the support and resources that they require to ensure that they meet the needs of the child in their care—that is, gender, religion, ethnic origin, language et cetera. The last thing is departmental policies and services.

In relation to the foster care recruitment campaign, the minister launched a campaign on 29 March this year as part of the Australian Foster Care Conference in Fremantle, with the aim of recruiting 250 new foster carers by early next year. I suppose the campaign is about promoting, through advertising—12 weeks on Channel Seven and GWN—the recruitment of 250 foster carers. As well as that, it was promoted in community newspapers and other media and by mobilising members of Parliament, like the member for Ocean Reef, to promote foster care in their electorates. Posters and promotional material have been available. To date, the foster care recruitment campaign prompted a total of 839 inquiries—585 from the metropolitan area and 204 from the country. A small call centre is active and provides interested members of the public with a comprehensive information pack. The member can see that quite a comprehensive and concerted effort has been made.

An increased number of assessment staff will be put in place. This is a work in progress. It is fair to say that the department believes that it is meeting all the expectations. The minister looks forward to an increase in the number of foster carers in the coming months to look after some of our most vulnerable children.

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**Ms L.L. BAKER:** I will continue on that subject, because I am interested in foster carers. I acknowledge the recruitment campaign that is in place. I take the minister back to the 2007 recruitment campaign. I know the minister was not sitting over there, but some of the advisers would have been.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I was sitting on the other side, I think.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** In the area, but probably not looking at this subject at the time. How many new foster carers were recruited as a result of that campaign?

**The CHAIRMAN:** I ask the member to indicate the page number and the line item to which her question refers.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** It is the same page that we were on. It is the seventh dot point on page 781. Can the minister tell me how many foster carers were recruited in the last foster carer campaign and what was the recruitment time frame in getting people on board?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** It is a good question. As I was on the other side and was not intimately involved in this issue, I will ask the director general to provide the member with the answer.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** Although I was not with the department until late 2007, I can advise that the foster carer recruitment in 2007 was nothing in the order of the current recruitment. There were advertisements, local efforts and so on. There was an attempt to lift the effort. The reality of our situation with foster carers, certainly when I came to the department in September 2007, was that there was a most desperate need to build capacity in that area. I would go on district visits and it was the first thing staff would throw at me. They would say that they did not have enough carers. Since that time we have been lifting our efforts with local campaigns, and the rate of application has been increasing. Before we launched the current campaign we had something like 80 inquiries in the month preceding. That doubled the number we were receiving on a monthly basis 18 months before that, in 2007. As the minister indicated, our current campaign over a period of close to two months, but not yet two months, has resulted in close to 850 inquiries. The scale is very different. It is worth bearing in mind that we would anticipate realising or registering about 10 per cent of those who make inquiries. As the minister indicated, it takes some months. The assessment process takes about three and a half months. Prior to that, a family that is making a major life-changing decision for itself has to really consider the information, come to an information night, have a home visit and make the decision that it wants to go through the application process.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** I have a further question. How long does that take?

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** Once the application is received, it takes three and a half months. It depends on the family circumstances with travel, availability and so on or whether they are willing to increase the speed at which they are willing to travel to put this life-changing decision into practice. The period preceding that could be as little as a few weeks or, again, it could be a couple of months. To become a foster carer we think in terms of four to six months. Six months is about right for that level of decision by a family.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** I have a further question. What is the success rate of placements in foster carers?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I seek some clarification. Does the member mean the rate at which somebody remains a foster carer or drops out of the system?

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** Let us take the number of inquiries that the director general mentioned; that is, 80 inquiries. How many would actually end up as successful placements? He then said that 10 per cent actually become placements—that is, eight—but how many of them are successful?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is the member asking how many families pass the assessment process?

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** The member is asking how many are retained after the placement.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I thought I heard the director general say that out of the inquiries, 10 per cent end up as foster carers. Is the member asking whether there is a 12-month survival rate or five-year survival rate?

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** I assume there are indicators. What are they?

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** The minister answered the previous question about the foster care partnership. We see the foster care partnership as the other side of a major recruitment effort. The foster care partnership tells us how we work with foster carers so that they feel valued, are supported and, to put it colloquially, are part of the team that looks after the child. Doing that is essential to retention. What kills retention is when we do not have enough carers for the number of children we have and when there is a natural tendency to overload their capacity and we do not have enough staff to provide the necessary support to foster carers. That is where we were in 2007 and 2006. We are not there anymore. We have the capacity to look after foster carers and we are driving a way of working that treats them with full and proper respect and gives them the necessary support. We hope, therefore,

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that we will retain every one of those carers whom we recruit until their life circumstances change. We are therefore aiming for way up in the 90s.

[7.40 pm]

**Mr I.M. BRITZA:** I refer the minister to the second footnote on page 785 under “Explanation of Significant Movements” dealing with responsible parenting. I have three questions. Can the minister advise me of the locations in which these programs are operating; secondly, the referral numbers through the program; and, thirdly, the outcomes achieved?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I thank the member for Morley, in his role as a responsible parent, for his question on responsible parenting. The responsible parenting service involves two areas: one is parent support and the other is what we call the Best Beginnings program. The parent support program is delivered to parents whose children are under 15 years of age and who are not attending school; whose children are involved in antisocial behaviour; and whose children are at home or in the community and beginning to be involved in offending behaviour. The aim of the program is to increase the capacity of parents for improving the socialisation of their child; to increase school attendance, which is important; and to reduce antisocial and criminal behaviour at home, at school or in the community. As the member for Morley can see, it is a very important service. The service is provided at 14 locations across all eight metropolitan district offices of the Department for Child Protection, as well as at Peel and east and west Kimberley. Between 1 July 2008 and 31 March this year the parent support service had provided services to 596 families. An evaluation for assessing the effectiveness of the service indicated that it has continued to improve those key indicators: 85 per cent of parents agreed that parent support helped them develop useful parenting skills; 85 per cent felt there was an improvement in their confidence as a parent; 75 per cent felt there was an improvement in how they communicated with their child; and 74 per cent felt there was an improvement in their relationship with their child. As to outcomes regarding socialisation, school attendance level, antisocial behaviour and those sorts of things, 70 per cent felt there was at least some improvement in their child's behaviour since their involvement in the program; 55 per cent felt there was an improvement in the relationship with their child and other significant adults—for example, teachers; and 45 per cent noted an improvement in the relationship between their child and other siblings.

The other part of the responsible parenting service is a program called Best Beginnings. It is provided in the 10 metropolitan district locations, as well as Albany and Kalgoorlie. It will commence in Kununurra this year, although I am not sure whether it has already commenced. This program has provided services for 289 families between July 2008 and 31 March this year. It is a work between the Department for Child Protection and the Department of Health. It basically began with two pilot studies, one in Albany and one in Midland, before expanding into those areas I mentioned. Best Beginnings is, obviously, to do with younger children. An evaluation was conducted by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, a reputable research organisation. The evaluation found that potentially valuable impacts extended from the resolution of short-term to longer-term situational issues. It found that four in five clients believed that the program had a positive impact on how their child grew and developed and had improved aspects of life for them and their babies. As the member for Morley can see, the Better Beginnings program starts at a young age, as the term suggests. The evaluation also found that it increased the capacity of parents to cope with life in their parenting role. As a father of five children now aged between 20 and 28 years, I would say that parenting was the hardest thing that I have ever done in my life.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Do not worry, we will make this harder for the minister!

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I thank the member for Joondalup for that; I am very encouraged by it!

I was going to say to the member for Morley that the performance of service delivery by staff and coordinators was highlighted in the Telethon Institute report for the pursuit of a high standard of commitment to the improvement of services in the system. Again, therefore, it is an ongoing work in progress. Essentially, the report by the Telethon Institute said that Best Beginnings was making a significant and enduring contribution to parenting in the state, particularly for young children.

**Mr I.M. BRITZA:** Although the programs are for parenting, can the department give an indication on the involvement of fathers?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Before I defer to the director general, when I said that parenting was probably the hardest thing I have ever done, I probably did not play the principal role in the parenting of my children. My wife, Kathryn, did most of the heavy lifting.

I take the member for Morley's point that, obviously, when we talk about parenting we mean a mum and a dad and that they both have important roles to play. That is probably the bleeding obvious, but I will defer to the director general.

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[7.50 pm]

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** A significant development in the department that preceded me occurred under the previous Minister for Child Protection. That was the development of a framework for the involvement of fathers in their children's lives. This framework, which was published, from memory, in mid to late 2007, has provided the intellectual impetus and ways of working for our staff to try to better engage fathers.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Who was the minister with that great foresight?

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** I would credit him with that, member for Cannington.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I will add some additional information concerning parental support and Best Beginnings district statistics. The member for Joondalup will be happy that I can provide the number of referrals' children for the period 1 July 2008 to 31 July 2009. By district: there are 37 families under the parental support program and 40 under the Best Beginnings program in Joondalup. The figures for Cannington, the member for Cannington, are 72 families receiving parental support, and 24 Best Beginnings.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Can the minister define the areas of Joondalup and Cannington to which he is referring? When I think of Joondalup, I think of my electorate. What is the Department for Child Protection area for Joondalup or Cannington?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** The member is going to make it hard for me! I will defer to the director general for the specific areas. Having provided some good information, the member for Joondalup now wants more detail about the boundaries of Joondalup.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** That is not entirely easy as the department's districts do not match the electorate boundaries. Joondalup runs north to, I believe, Ocean Reef and south to Carine. Joondalup would be the centre of the district, and it is the most northerly metro district. Cannington, obviously, is centred around Cannington, but takes in as far back as Belmont and Victoria Park; and it intersects with the Armadale district, around Maddington I think. I am sure that the minister will be more than happy to provide a list of suburbs for our metropolitan districts, if that would assist the member for Joondalup.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is the minister happy to provide that as supplementary information?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I am happy to provide that.

[*Supplementary Information No A13.*]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I refer the minister to page 781 and the third dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" that relates to the recruitment of staff and includes remote community child protection workers. Again, the minister may need to provide this through supplementary information. What is the current caseworker FTE by district? What will the caseworker FTE be with the 2009 budget allocation? Could I have current FTEs, and what is proposed under this 2009 budget allocation? And, also, what is the current caseworker vacancy FTE by district?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I will give the member for Mandurah a breakdown in a minute. The department received an additional 269 FTEs in the 2008-09 budget, and as of 31 March, 91 per cent of these positions have been filled following the implementation of attraction and retention strategies. This includes the recruitment of remote community child protection workers in the Dampier peninsula, Oombulgarri, Kalumburu, Balgo and Warmun. The department received an additional 45 FTEs in the 2009-10 budget process, of which 33 were child protection workers; nine child protection workers to be collocated with the WA Police, as I mentioned before, and three to be located in Blackstone, Warakurna and Burringurrah. It was interesting, the day after the budget was brought down, that the most elated person was a woman called Dot, who was working in the child protection area in the goldfields. I was in Boulder at the time and Dot was elated by the extra remote community child protection workers that she would receive. For her, that was the best part of the budget.

The FTE allocation as at March 2009 in the metro districts is as follows: Armadale, 45.8 caseworker FTEs, with 1.8 vacant caseworkers; Cannington, 39 FTEs, with three vacant positions; Fremantle, 41.5 FTEs, with 1.5 vacant positions; Joondalup, 34.2 FTEs, with two vacant positions; Mirrabooka, 44.75 FTEs, with no vacancies; Perth, 42.5 FTEs, with three vacant positions; and Rockingham, 35.2 FTEs, with 7.2 vacant positions. I do not know whether the member wants any further information.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to receive the rest as supplementary information as I do not want to take up too much time.

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**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** In the country districts, which are particularly relevant to me being an Esperance-goldfields representative, there are 26.6 FTEs, with five vacancies. I am not sure whether that might be addressed, director general, by a reduction by one because of recent announcements or is that absolutely up to date?

[8.00 pm]

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** As a general point, we are very confident that our current pool recruitment process will reduce the vacancy numbers that the minister is reading out to near zero in the metropolitan area and will reduce them substantially in the country. Some of the harder to fill regions such as the goldfields will still have some vacancies, but they are reducing.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Just to carry on, in the great southern, there are 21.1 caseworker FTEs and 1.5 vacancies; east Kimberley, 23.8 FTEs, two vacancies, west Kimberley, 30 FTEs, five vacancies; Murchison, 30.6 FTEs, 2.1 vacancies; Peel, 24.35 FTEs, four vacancies; Pilbara, 37.6 FTEs, two vacancies; and the wheatbelt, 32.3 FTEs, three vacancies.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** A measure of how effective recruitment is can be identified or measured by the number of unallocated cases, which are also known as monitored cases. Industrial relations imposes a ratio loading of 15 per caseworker and anything above that is notionally allocated to team leaders. What is the number of unallocated or monitored cases by district?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** These parameters are getting a little complicated for me, representing the Minister for Child Protection in this house. I will refer that question to the director general to provide the detail.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** I will start with the total number of monitored cases. As at the end of March, there were 808. That was down from 1 141 the previous month. Three or four months before that, they were around the 1 400 mark. As the member indicated, we are seeing the impact of the recruitment of additional staff on the number of unallocated cases. The other impact on monitored cases is the caseload that staff are carrying. As we recruit at the scale we have, we are bringing in a lot of young and new workers who cannot reach the 15-case maximum allowance simply because of their experience. It takes time for them to work up to that caseload. Our average caseloads vary between districts from between 10 and 13. They, too, will increase over time. The growing experience of the additional staff we have recruited over the past couple of years—we are still recruiting—will continue to put downward pressure on this number.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I do not expect the list to be read out, but does the minister have figures for the number of unallocated or monitored cases for each district? Given the time, that is something that we could simply table as supplementary information.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I am happy to provide that supplementary information.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am asking for supplementary information on the number of unallocated or monitored cases by district, both metropolitan and country.

[*Supplementary information No A14.*]

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Minister, I refer to “Supporting Individuals/Families at Risk or In Crisis” on page 785. I assume that this is where the income management trials are being funded. I refer to the Minister for Education’s media release of 18 November 2008 in which she announced income management in Cannington and the Kimberley. An answer from Dr Constable to a parliamentary question dated 7 April indicated that income management in Cannington is not actually proceeding. What is the situation with that income management trial in Cannington? Is it operating? If it is operating, how many staff are involved, how many families are involved and what performance have we had so far on the trial?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** It is important to say by way of introduction that income management as a child protection measure, both voluntary and compulsory, was expanded to the additional metropolitan districts of Mirrabooka, Midland and Joondalup from 28 April. Compulsory income management as a child protection measure is used as a case management tool to address child neglect. As of 1 May 2009, 22 parents have been placed on income management by the department and 135 individuals have approached Centrelink directly to volunteer for income management. In answer to the specifics of the member’s question, the number of Department for Child Protection cases on income management since implementation by selective demographic characteristics in Cannington is nine parents or guardians and six family units, and the number of children whose parents or guardians are on child protection income management in Cannington is 22.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** How many staff are involved? What is the number of FTEs?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** The advice I have from the director general is that the department does not make a specific allocation of FTEs to the income management program.

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**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The income management trial in Cannington commenced on 24 November. Is it continuing?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Yes.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** That is contrary to the answer to the question given in Parliament on 7 April by the Minister for Education.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** That is the advice that I have been given.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** My question relates to the final dot point on page 781 and the new approach to homelessness with the commonwealth and state governments collaborating on the homelessness national partnership agreement. Can the minister provide details of that partnership? How will it work and what funds has the commonwealth allocated for Western Australia?

[8.10 pm]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I thank the member for Darling Range for the question. I suppose the whole issue of homelessness has some synergies with my portfolio of mental health and responsibility for drugs and alcohol. We are committed to providing new and innovative services to assist homeless people. Homelessness is an awful situation to be in. The commonwealth and states have agreed to provide an additional \$800 million for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. The commonwealth will provide an additional \$400 million over four years from 2009-10 and the states will match that with a \$400 million commitment. The total Western Australian allocation is \$100 million, comprising \$49.7 million from the commonwealth for support services, with the state matching contribution of \$51.2 million, which includes \$4.2 million for capital land, existing services and support cover over four years. The Western Australian implementation plan is based on three areas to address homelessness. The first is early intervention and prevention to stop people from becoming homeless, because prevention is better than the cure. The second is to break the cycle once a person becomes homeless. We are investing in services to help people get back on their feet and find stable accommodation and, wherever possible, to obtain employment. The third area is to provide a better connected service to make sure that the services for homeless people are long term and sustainable.

The advice I have received is that the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness has agreed that the focus of state and territories will be on four core outputs: firstly, to implement the "a place to call home" initiative; secondly, to implement the street-to-home initiatives for chronic homeless people; thirdly, to provide support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies; and, fourthly, to provide assistance to people who leave child protection services or correctional or health facilities. By way of background, the other additional outputs are the provision of services to assist people with substance abuse—which is an issue that I have concerns about, particularly in my portfolio—to secure and maintain accommodation, for which \$5 million has been provided; testing of new funding models for specialist homeless services; support for women and children experiencing domestic violence to stay in their present housing when it is safe to do so; the provision of assistance to homeless people, including families and children, to stabilise their situation; and some outreach programs to connect rough sleepers in remote areas to long-term housing. There are a couple of other points of note.

The proposed WA initiatives focus on early intervention and prevention, as I said, to stop people from becoming homeless and also to break the cycle and provide support. A proposal called the Foyer development will provide safe and affordable accommodation for young people, and a joined-up approach will be taken to provide mainstream services by the Department for Child Protection, the Department of Housing, the Department of Health's mental health division, the Drug and Alcohol Office, the Department of Corrective Services, and the Disability Services Commission. This is a fundamental implementation plan that recognises that a lot of these unfortunate situations involve not just one agency, but a number of agencies, and that a cross-agency approach is needed to try to address the awful situation of homelessness.

**Mr I.M. BRITZA:** Does the Department for Child Protection have figures on whether homelessness is either increasing or decreasing? What is the status?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** When I addressed members about the long day that we have all had, it occurred to me that someone would ask me how many homeless people there are in Western Australia. I did not resolve that situation in my own mind, so I will ask the director general whether he has any idea of what the figures are and the direction in which they are going.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** The numbers are assessed by survey. The best figure that we have is the number of people who accessed supported accommodation services. The latest number we have is for 2007-08 when 10 900 clients and approximately 8 300 accompanying children utilised the supported accommodation assistance program.

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Earlier census figures give a higher number, which is just under 13 400. That is a census figure, so it will have an error factor. There is not a definitive answer to whether homelessness is increasing, but it certainly was the experience of the department, particularly throughout 2008, that an increasing number of people contacted the department and said that they were homeless and were seeking assistance. Fortunately, that figure has tailed off a bit this year but there are still larger numbers of homeless people than there were previously.

**Mr I.M. BRITZA:** As a further question, has there been a significant increase in the number of homeless children, as opposed to adults?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I thank the member for Morley. The director general said that the department received 10 900 clients or more and that approximately 8 300 accompanying children received support under the supported accommodation assistance program. In answering the member's question, it might help to say that the 2007-08 SAAP national data collection for WA indicates that approximately 1 600 unaccompanied young people aged between 15 and 19 years and 1 500 young people aged between 20 and 24 years were SAAP clients. I have been passed a note to say that the figures might be higher than that. I am sorry that I cannot be any more specific than that. The demand for the supported assistance accommodation package by homeless people in 2006-07 found that on an average day when the data collection was undertaken, nationally, 57 per cent of people who requested immediate accommodation found it difficult to receive it. By comparison, the WA figures show that on average, 60 per cent people who requested immediate accommodation did not receive it and that 32 adults were unaccompanied with children and there were 34 accompanying children. That gives the member an idea of the demand. That is being quite frank. It is a difficult problem. It can be seen that some sincere programs have been set up to deal with it and some sincere money has been put into them.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I refer to the fourth dot point on page 781, which is about learning and development. Has there been a reduction in the number of full-time equivalents delivering learning and development strategies, and what is the current number of FTEs allocated to learning and development?

[8.20 pm]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I will refer the question to the director general. He has some specific figures that I do not have available to me. Maybe he can shed some light on that.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** The first thing to be very clear about is that there has been no reduction in full-time equivalents committed to learning. Learning is a major priority for the department. As well as not compromising our front-line service delivery, we have not compromised learning. The approximate FTE numbers are in two areas. There are 25 FTEs in the learning and development centre, which provides training and other learning opportunities across the department and to some extent to the non-government sector. In addition to that, there is a senior practice development officer in every district of the department, so there are 17 of those positions. Those positions are largely about learning at the local level. There are some other positions within the department. There are two directors of case practice, for example, who also support learning directly in relation to case practice. That is a total of 44 full-time equivalents. The difficulty is when we include part positions, but there has been no change.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Does the department have a program that works on the development of the staff, carrying out in-service training on a regular basis? Can the minister give us a quick outline of the program for that, particularly as he said that so many young workers are coming into the department now? It is fine having a degree, but they need the experience on top of that. What programs does the department have in place for that?

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** As I said, learning is a priority for our agency. A human service relies on the skills of a human being, and our people need to grow in order to do the tough, confronting, emotionally demanding work they do. We expect people to come in with a base degree. They then all have to go through a program called Orientation to Principles and Practices of Child Protection, which we used to call Start Up. It is a one-week program that they have to complete before they can carry cases. However, their learning in the department has begun before that, through supervision of how they work cases, and it carries on after they are formally allocated cases through supervision and an individual learning plan that aims to pick up on their individual needs revealed during the orientation training. A range of learning activities occur at the local district level, and other areas of the department also pick up regular learning activities at branch level. In the districts, it is particularly focused on the implementation of Signs of Safety as our child protection practice framework. In addition to that, there is a calendar of learning activities that people can tap into as their individual needs require. Each staff member does a performance development assessment with a supervisor, and that results in individual learning goals. Also, and very important to us, is what we call our people development framework, which sets out the conceptual basis on how we promote learning and, to use a bit of jargon, aim to become a learning organisation right across the department. It comprises around 16 separate projects, one of which, to illustrate, is Making Time for Learning at

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the Workplace. It is not an enormous project of itself, but it requires some structural adjustment so that learning is given time at the workplace. I will close by saying that this is not soft stuff. The effectiveness of our work depends on the skills of people, and it is a demanding, emotionally confronting area of work, so learning is an essential part of service delivery.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Does any part of that program focus down to the early learning years, in actually picking out the developmental needs of children, and whether a child is developing properly? Is there any remediation in that?

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** There must be. In terms of our caseworkers, the child protection practice framework comes first, but then we need to know about trauma, because that characterises all the children we deal with. Then we need to know about the developmental needs of children. The children we are taking into care are getting younger, so those years from zero to three years are very important. A range of other knowledge sets enable people to deal with families and children. With respect to early years, Best Beginnings is focused on zero to two years, so they have more specific learning programs to enable those workers to do those tasks.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Is Best Beginnings a voluntary program, entered into when a child is placed in care? Is Best Beginnings also delivered to children and families in their original family, rather than foster placement? Is it voluntary or is it forced intervention, so to speak?

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** Best Beginnings is a voluntary program and aims to work quite intensively, particularly, though not exclusively, with younger mothers in those first couple of years when otherwise they would be at serious risk of losing their children into care.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** I refer to the seventh and eighth dot points on page 781. In the Ford report, there was a requirement for a health and education care plan for every child in care. I believe that we were using the director generals' group to negotiate with the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Training to put that process in place. Of the 3 000 children in care, how many have up-to-date education and health plans? What is the length of time before a child coming into care today can expect to have a health and education plan in place?

[8.30 pm]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Thank you, member for Maylands. I think it is important to say that these are pilot programs. We have not started them yet. The pilot programs for health assessments, and plans for implementing educational assessments, are starting in collaboration with the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Training. The Department for Child Protection will be developing and implementing the health and education plans for children and young people under the chief executive officer's care.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** Is there none yet?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** The current position is being developed in partnership with the Department of Health. The new health care planning process commenced with a six-month pilot phase from 28 April—recently. The pilot aims to develop a sustainable pathway through which physical, mental, dental and developmental health needs in children are adequately identified and addressed. The pilot has been conducted in the following Department for Child Protection districts: Fremantle, great southern, Midland and the Pilbara. All children new to care, not requiring a specialist medical service on entry into care, will receive a general medical examination. Is this the information the member wanted?

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** Yes. I was interested to know whether the program had started yet and how many are in place in the pilot program at the moment.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** For the detail of the number in the pilot, I will refer to the director general. Obviously the member can see that we have just started the program; namely, on 28 April.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** Given that we are in the first month, we expect to have our first collection of numbers at the end of the current month, May. We will be able to answer the question on those health pilots early in June.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** The hot spot when a child comes into care seems to be the length of time between when the child comes in and when the carer is involved in that care plan. What is the number of children in care for more than 20 days with no planning recorded? I am not asking about the health and education plan, but the care plan.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** The current number for that at the end of March is 287.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** Thank you.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** I rush to add, if I may, that we are confident that we know what we are doing with all those children. There is a plan in that a caseworker will have written down what is occurring. However, we do not

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have those 287 care plans formally recorded on our system. It is a real priority to get this compliance number up. But I reassure members that a plan exists for each child. I might also perhaps note, if I have members' indulgence, that the number of children for whom there is no formal recorded care plan has decreased substantially over the past three years. Overall, the number is 8.8 per cent at the moment. That is down from 23 per cent this time last year and 50 per cent the year before that.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I refer to page 786. Under "Works in Progress" I am interested in the progress of the Kath French locked therapeutic facility. What will the current model look like in terms of staffing, beds et cetera? I understand that legislation is required to give requisite powers to the CEO to lock up, for want of a better term, children in need of this intensive therapy intervention. When is that legislation expected to come before Parliament?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Which line items are they?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am referring to hostels under "Works in Progress". "Refurbishment of Existing Facilities Intensive Therapeutic Unit ..." I am assuming that that is the Kath French Centre.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** The 2009-10 estimated expenditure is \$1.1 million for the intensive therapeutic unit—Ford review. That is the line item the member referred to.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes. Through the minister, I ask the director general where progress is for that facility. What is the modelling looking like and, because legislation is required, when do we expect that to be introduced into Parliament? When it is ready, we do not want to be waiting for the legislation to pass and therefore holding it up so that we do not have an operational facility.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Thank you, member for Mandurah. The initial upgrade of the Kath French Centre to an interim facility will be funded through \$1.2 million capital funding provided through the Ford review in 2007. Some recurrent funding of \$900 000 is available to commence the facility. Additional recurrent funding has been requested to fully implement the interim secure service—\$2.57 million in 2009-10 and \$2.644 million in 2010-11. Additional recurrent and capital funding beyond 2010-11 will be required to expand the service. I suppose the current position of the draft secure care legislation the member referred to has been endorsed by cabinet and is expected to be introduced into Parliament and finalised later this year.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Is it true that there will be an amendment to the Children and Community Services Act 2004?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** My advice is, yes, either at the end of this year or early 2010. I suppose, for the centre, the proposed model of secure care has been drawn from Victoria's Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. The key features of the secure care proposal include criteria for admission, length of admission, transition and exit planning review and inspection. The department's plan is to establish an interim eight-bed secure-care facility located at the current Kath French Centre, Stoneville. Pending the legislation being passed, this will be operational early in 2010.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Is the model similar to the Victorian facility? I visited that a couple of years back.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** The advice I have is that the model of secure care proposed was drawn from Victoria's Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. The key features of that secure-care proposal include that admission to secure care will be limited to children at risk of harming themselves where the risk is immediate and substantial and other care options are unsuitable, for example, mental health. The length of admission placement in a secure-care facility could be up to 21 days and subject to extension for a further 21 days in special circumstances. I hope this provides some information for the member that is relevant.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Thank you.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** A written transition and exit plan will be required for every child leaving the secure-care facility to support children on discharge. Administrative decisions by the chief executive officer will be subject to review by the State Administrative Tribunal. The CEO may appoint assessors to inspect the facility.

[8.40 pm]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** One part of my question was not answered. I do not necessarily expect the answer to be exact. What is the potential staffing ratio model for an eight-bed facility?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I will refer that question to the director general.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** For the eight-bed unit we would be looking at quite a heavy staffing model—29.5 FTE. To really get into the detail, we are looking at four people on at any one time, plus an additional three at peak times. In addition there would be the unit manager, the psychologist, case coordinator—there is a lot of movement with

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only a 21-day admission—and an education officer. Three staff would be on overnight duty. On weekends we would hope to move to 12-hour shifts with six people managing that.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I know that I am drawing a long bow and you, Madam Chair, are good to me in this respect. I have two last questions on this issue. Firstly, if this facility were up and running now would it be filled, given the current cases that may be faced by the department? Secondly, and I know this is cheeky, what is the government's intention for the Bedford facility that was burnt down earlier this year? I know it is drawing a long bow, Madam Chair.

**The CHAIRMAN:** In the interest of fairness the member will lose his spot.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to lose my spot after those two questions are answered.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I am happy to refer the first part of the question to the director general. I do not know what line item the Bedford question refers to. Maybe Madam Chair is very kind to the member, but maybe I will not be this time.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I might be cheeky by saying that the question is about the refurbishment of existing or non-existing hostel accommodation. I am sure the director general will be able to answer the question.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I ask the director general to answer the question.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** If the secure care centre were available now, we would fill it. There have been some well publicised cases of very high-cost placements for children who are in care. We have argued very strongly that it is essential both to give those children and young people every chance of rehabilitating into something akin to normal life and protecting the community. The secure care facility will be one part of managing those children and others who get into serious strife from time to time.

Together with the expansion and reform of our next stage of residential care, which includes hostels like Bedford, we are expanding those from 40 to 56 beds with a more intense staffing model and moving from institutional settings, such as Bedford, to four-bed facilities for young people in much more home-like environments. We will not be rebuilding Bedford as an eight-bed facility for emergency accommodation. We can be very clear on that, because it is not the model we are looking towards. We are talking to other government agencies that may have a use for that facility that would be much less taxing on the neighbourhood. Should we retain it, we would be looking at it fitting within our existing model, which is about four beds and once again looking to an approach that is much less taxing on that neighbourhood and more suitable for its location.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Again, thank you, Madam Chair for being lenient on me.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** I refer to the eighth dot point on page 781, which deals with residential care. I am interested, not surprisingly, in the role of the non-government sector in the provision of residential care and the proportionality between that and children in care in the system. The dot point is not exciting; it refers to residential care.

I refer to the fee-for-service placement figure—the expensive one—that is usually included in the NGO figures when they are quoted in terms of proportion. If the expensive fee-for-service placement is deducted from the figures, what would be the proportion of placements to NGOs? Is that proportion increasing, decreasing or remaining the same? I suspect that it might be a detailed question.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** It does seem to be a detailed question. Is the member referring to the provision of additional placements in the non-government sector out-of-home care?

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** I am referring to residential care. That is correct.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Before I ask the director general to provide the detail, I advise the member that the department has increased the number of placements for children. It is a residential placement question and it is important. An additional 54 out-of-care placements were provided to non-government agencies in recognition of their role. It demonstrates how the department has initiated reforms in response to the Ford review, which recommended expanding the role of the non-government sector in the provision of out-of-home care placements.

In response to the Ford review there was an increase in the number of children and young people in the care of the CEO requiring placement. Negotiations commenced between the department and non-government agencies for the provision of additional placements. In July 2008 the department provided \$1.678 million for an additional 54 placements, bringing the total number of non-government agency placements to 330, which represents a 19 per cent increase in the number of funded non-government placements. The additional placements include 46 foster care placements, 21 of which were emergency foster care; six group care placements; and two foster care placements for disabled children.

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The additional placements were negotiated with Anglicare WA, Parkerville Children and Youth Care, Uniting Care West, Wanslea Family Services and Yorganop Childcare Aboriginal Corporation Foster Care Association. I ask the director general to provide the details on the care placement costings.

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** I am interested in what the figure is if the expensive care component is deducted.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** As the minister mentioned, currently there are 330 placements in the non-government sector. If we take out a dozen for the high fee numbers, that brings the figure down to 318. It is moveable depending on whether places are filled. We are currently working with the agencies on new contracts for next year, so there will be some adjustment. It is around the 330 mark, minus 12—about 318. The 330 is approximately 21 per cent of all the placements available. Interestingly, that is pretty close to what the non-government sector says is its target; that is, to have 25 per cent of places in the non-government sector. We are committed to growing that part of this area of work, and the most immediate indication of that now is the tender for 84 residential placements—once again in four-bed group homes in the non-government sector—which was released about two weeks ago for funding in the current financial year.

[8.50 pm]

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** Just for clarification, given that the number of children coming into care is increasing, which will impact on the proportionality between state residential care and the care in the NGO sector, does the minister expect the number of NGO placements to go up or down proportionally? Am I explaining myself clearly?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I will defer to the director general.

**Mr T.M. Murphy:** On balance we expect it to go up. That said, I do recognise, as is implicit in the member's question, that we are currently on a major foster care recruitment campaign. We expect to have more carers. What we hope and what we anticipate, though, is that more carers will allow us to have fewer children in care and for them to receive better care, as well as to allow us to accommodate a substantial proportion of the growth that we anticipate. Last year we bought those 54 foster care placements with non-government organisations, which was a significant proportion and was the bulk of our growth in that area last year. This year we are buying an extra 84 residential placements. On balance, therefore, we think the proportion will continue to grow, and that is our preferred outcome.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before we continue, members, I am mindful of the time and that we do have division 62, the Department for Communities, to progress to. I have the member for Joondalup's question on my list.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Madam Chair, opposition members have had a quiet discussion and we are very happy to conclude this division just before 9.00 pm so that we can go on to that division at nine o'clock.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is terrific.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Madam Chair, can we accommodate a comfort break in there as well?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** What about we go to five minutes to nine?

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** We told the minister we were going to make it hard! We are not giving him comfort breaks!

**Ms L.L. BAKER:** No comfort breaks, no!

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** Do the minister's kids give him comfort breaks?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is it the resolution of the committee that we go to a comfort break in approximately three minutes?

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

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** It depends on the minister's answer.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That leaves the member for Joondalup's question.

**Mr A.P. O'GORMAN:** I refer to page 782 and the entry under the heading "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators" that refers to the average number of placements per child in the chief executive officer's care per year. The target for 2009-10 is the same as the target for 2008-09. Given the review of the multiple placements and the range of strategies put in place, why has the target figure not been set any higher?

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** The member for Joondalup is referring to the average number of placements per child in the CEO's care in the second line under "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators". By way of background, the care planning process has explicit focus on the child's placement, and placement support needs to improve stability in the placement and to reduce the risk of multiple placements. I understand the nub of the member's

**Extract from Hansard**

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Chairman; Mr David Templeman; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Tony Simpson; Mr Tony O'Gorman; Mr Albert Jacob;  
Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Ian Britza; Mr Bill Johnston

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question. The estimated average number of placements per year in 2008-09 was higher than the target as a result of the significant increase in the number of children in care in the past 12 months, which placed pressure on the care system. The member's question was why the target was not lower than 1.4. The ideal, obviously, is for a child in foster care to have one placement a year to add to stability in the care of the child. That is ideal. Recognising that pressure on the system, though, it is important to note the current position of our recruitment campaign. We expect, obviously, that it will attract a greater number of foster carers. There was evidence earlier this evening that there has been a sincere and serious effort to do that and that there has been a response to the system. It is very likely that there will be an increase in the number of substantive foster carers, and hopefully we can improve the matching process between the needs of a child and the foster carer, and that it will contribute to much improved placement stability.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 8.55 to 9.00 pm*