

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE – LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO 2

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2005-06

MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES
MINISTER FOR YOUTH

Date: 22 September 2005

Questions One, Two and Three

The Hon John Ryan asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth:

- (1)
 - (a) How many staff that currently occupy those positions at the Richmond Community Services Centre are part of recent intakes of new caseworkers?
 - (b) Have any of those caseworkers at Richmond been employed subject to final completion of their professional qualifications? If so, how many?
- (2) Can you give the Committee information as to how many of the 11 positions at the Richmond district office have been filled – by people who are currently working there, as opposed to filled by people who are on leave and so on?
- (3) Could you also give the Committee some idea of how the Richmond CSC compares with other district offices, in terms of the number of cases that are referred from the DoCS Helpline to the Richmond office, and the extent of their severity as measured by whether they are category one or category four cases?

ANSWERS:

- (1)
 - (a) Four of the 11 permanent caseworker positions established at Richmond CSC were filled in March 2005 through the caseworker bulk recruitment process. These four caseworkers were working for DoCS as temporary employees prior to their permanent appointment at Richmond.
 - (b) All the caseworkers recruited to Richmond during the caseworker bulk recruitment had completed their professional academic qualifications.
- (2) Ten of the 11 permanent caseworker positions at the Richmond CSC are occupied and currently filled by staff who are actually working in those positions. One part time caseworker position is currently vacant.

- (3) In 2003-04, Richmond CSC received 1,528 risk of harm reports. The risk profile of child protection reports referred from the Helpline to Richmond CSC is very similar to the profile across the Metro West Region as a whole. The response time distribution of referrals is also comparable to the distribution for the Metro West Region generally.

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Reba Meagher MP
Minister for Community Services
Minister for Youth

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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 4

The Hon Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth:

[Paraphrased] Can you give the Committee the past, current and future spending breakdown in key program areas such as Community Solutions, the Area Assistance Scheme, Families First, the Strengthening Local Communities Strategy, Better Futures and the Aboriginal Children's (sic) Youth and Family Strategy?

ANSWER:

Details of 2004/05 actual expenditure and the 2005/06 budget for the relevant programs are provided below.

PROGRAM ITEM	2004/05 Actual \$(000's)	2005/06 Budget \$(000's)
Community Solutions	10,006	10,500
Area Assistance Scheme	10,969	10,526
Families First	26,172	28,686
Strengthening Local Communities	136	310
Better Futures	2,044	4,559
Aboriginal Child, Youth & Family	3,251	4,040

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**MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES
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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 5

The Hon Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth –

- (a) What funding will be made available to each of the 30 major projects that have been funded from the Community Solutions and Crime Prevention Strategy in 2005-06 and 2006-07?
- (b) What plans are in place to sustain the service delivery and community development initiatives that have been started under this program but for whom the funding will cease in 2005-06?

ANSWER:

(a) – (b)

The Community Solutions Strategy is a five year strategy to which \$50 million has been allocated. The clear intention of the Strategy was to provide new funding to respond to community pressures in key locations with a view to improving outcomes for communities. Some of the responses involved testing innovative approaches and identifying improvements in service delivery that might be adopted in the longer term. Some projects are already being incorporated into the Departmental programs of the participating agencies.

Evaluation of the Strategy is under way. There are also related policy reviews dealing with key areas of emphasis such as family and domestic violence and youth initiatives. This work will inform the Government's future policy and program decisions and options will be considered in the near future.

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Question No 6

The Hon Catherine Cusack MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth –

Are you aware that there is a recommendation for a preferred partnership arrangement with DoCS and the Women's Refuge Movement, to be devised through a memorandum of understanding? Are you aware of that proposal?

ANSWER:

The Women's Refuge Movement has submitted a proposal for consideration, which is complex and multifaceted. At this time there is no commitment to any element of the proposal.

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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 7

The Hon Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth –

Will the Area Assistance Scheme be reviewed in 2005/06 with a view to making changes in its funding level and operations from 2006/07?

ANSWER:

Applications for the current round of Area Assistance Scheme (AAS) funding closed on 7 September 2005. Successful organisations will be announced in March-April 2006 and will use their funding to deliver services in 2006-07.

There has been no change in project assessment methodology or any other significant operational aspect of the AAS since funding was awarded for 2005-06. Total available funding in 2006-07 will be similar to that provided in the previous round.



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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 8

The Hon Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth –

- (a) In the Better Futures for Young People Program and the Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy, how many projects have been funded and at what cost over what period?
- (b) Are there uncommitted funds available in each of these programs in 2005/06 and beyond?
- (c) If so, what are the amounts and what level of funding has been carried forward from underspending in 2004-05?

ANSWER:

- (a) The *Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy* and *Better Futures* began implementation in the 2002/03 financial year.

From 2002/03 to 2004/05 the *Better Futures* program funded over 100 projects totalling \$3,956,731 in Western Sydney, South East Sydney, Illawarra, Hunter, Central Coast and Western NSW.

From 2002/03 to 2004/05 the *Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy* funded over 170 projects totalling \$4,986,639 across NSW.

- (b) No.
- (c) No funding was carried forward from 2004/05.

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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 9

The Hon Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth –

- (a) What level of funding has been notionally allocated to the promotion and implementation of the Working Together for NSW Agreement and the Government and non government sector compact in 2005-06?
- (b) If no funds have been notionally allocated, why not?

ANSWER:

(a) – (b)

The *Working Together for NSW* Agreement has been developed in partnership with the Forum of Non-Government Agencies.

The implementation process for the Agreement is to be determined through an annual Reference Group meeting comprising representatives from the Forum of Non-Government Agencies and the Human Services Chief Executive Officers Group. Discussions are under way to plan for the first meeting of this group.

Funding requirements will be assessed as part of this process.



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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 10

The Hon Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth –

(a) [Paraphrase] With regard to the Helpline allocations, once they are allocated, do you have figures on how long it is until the person is actually seen?... You have priority levels...Do you have figures on how many of them are actually seen within that time – in other words, the link is closed? The target was 24 hours or 72 hours. The call was taken, allocated and the person was seen in that time – or, if not seen, allocated to someone who knows what needs to be done and does it...How often is [the target] met?

(b) You could say that one proxy was when the secondary risk of harm assessment started. In other words, when the caseworker actually got around to looking at it...Presumably the caseworker at some point logs on and looks at it and you should be able to measure when that happens. [Do you have that information?]

ANSWER:

(a) – (b)

Figures on the timeframes referred to are not available. Timeframes vary according to the individual circumstances of a case.



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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 11

Reverend the Hon Fred Nile MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth:

Minister, on page 4.4 there is a reference, "Recruitment is under way for an intensive family based service, based in the Arabic Community Council in Bankstown to service the Arabic community."

What was the relationship between DoCS and the Council?

Is DoCS paying for a staff member within the council or is there a DoCS staff worker working with the council? The underlying thought is the independence of the DoCS worker, whether they are working for the Council or for DoCS?

ANSWER:

Based in Bankstown, the Arab Council Australia, formerly the Arabic Communities Council, is a pan-Arabic, secular organisation whose services address a spectrum of welfare, social and settlement issues that affect Arabic communities.

The relationship between the Department of Community Services and the Arab Council Australia is based on funding arrangements through the Youth Partnership with Arabic Speaking Communities and through the Community Services Grants Program.

Under the Partnership, the Arab Council Australia has received \$525,000 to deliver the Arabic Intensive Family Support Service to families of Arabic speaking background in the Bankstown region, with referrals to the service emanating from the Department and involving families in crisis. The Service structure comprises a manager and three case workers recruited and employed directly by the Arab Council Australia.

The Arab Council Australia receives recurrent funding under the Community Services Grants Program for:

- Arabic Family Support (\$16,269): provides casework, advocacy, referral and support services to individuals and families.
- Arabic Welfare Centre (\$58,493): funding for operational costs and administration.
- Families Support Project (\$149,091): provides support to women with young children, and organises and resources a number of women's groups.

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QUESTION NO. 12

The Hon Reverend Fred Nile MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth:

(12) Page 4.3 states that the Violence Against Women specialist unit was transferred from the Attorney General's Department to your department, and that the unit co-ordinates the NSW strategy to reduce violence against women. Does the department have any particular problems in assisting Muslim women who may be exposed to domestic violence?

ANSWER:

The NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) provides services to all women affected by domestic violence through a number of initiatives. It is recognised that domestic violence is under-reported, particularly amongst some groups in the community where cultural and language barriers might prevent women from accessing services.

Through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), the Muslim Women's Resource Centre and Refuge is funded to provide Muslim women experiencing domestic violence with culturally appropriate language and accommodation services. Muslim women can also be provided with support and accommodation from the other women's refuges across NSW, where staff are trained to deal with domestic violence in a culturally sensitive manner.

Another language specific service is the Canterbury-Bankstown Interagency Domestic Violence Response Team. It is located in an area where there is a high proportion of residents of Muslim background and the high number of Arabic-speaking referrals it receives attests to its success in providing services to this group of women.

I am advised that of the 624 client families referred from April to September 2004, almost 50% came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with Arabic/Lebanese representing 26%.

The service commenced in 2002/03 and will receive funding of \$199,000 in 2005/06.

Apart from direct service provision, DoCS is committed to prevention strategies to address domestic violence. The transfer of the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit to DoCS has strengthened this commitment.

The Violence Against Women Specialist Unit conducts prevention initiatives around issues of domestic violence in various local communities with a diversity of target groups.

Issues of domestic violence are often difficult to combat. For migrant and refugee communities, these issues are quite sensitive. The Violence Against Women Specialist Unit has developed culturally sensitive initiatives to enable these communities to start talking about and challenging attitudes and behaviours that condone domestic violence. For example, the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit has developed a Safe Families Kit, which is an educational kit using images, to assist community workers facilitate discussion amongst migrant and refugee groups, including Muslim women, about domestic violence and sexual assault.

The Violence Against Women Specialist Unit has recognised that religious leaders play an important role in assisting Muslim women experiencing domestic violence. For the past three years, the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit has engaged leaders from various religions, including the Islamic faith, in the Religion and Family Harmony project. This project engages spiritual leaders to take an active role in challenging domestic violence in families and encourage respectful relationships. This project has recently received national funding of \$145,000 to continue doing this work with religious leaders.

Recently, the Violence Against Women Specialist Unit worked with the Immigrant Women's Speakout Association to develop a series of CD/audio resources in a number of community languages, including Arabic, aimed at raising awareness of domestic violence and the Apprehended Domestic Violence Order process.

DoCS is also currently engaged in a three year project with the Australian Arabic and Palestinian Support Association targeting Arabic communities in South and Western Sydney around domestic violence, parenting, youth, drug and alcohol, and healthy relationships issues.

DoCS also produces resources in a variety of community languages.

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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No. 13

Rev the Hon Fred Nile MLC asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth:

Are there any plans to assist other groups such as Pacific Islanders, perhaps in the Campbelltown area, with an intensive family based service? Is that program based in any one geographical area, or does it cover the metropolitan area? Is it geographically based?

ANSWER:

The NSW Youth Partnership with Pacific Island Communities received \$1.1 million over three years from 2002/03. The second stage of the Partnership was announced in May 2004 with a further \$4.5 million provided over three years from 2004/05. The Partnership budget for 2005/06 is \$1.5 million.

The Partnership:

- promotes the well-being of young people of Pacific backgrounds,
- increases parent support and education to help parents prevent risk taking behaviour by children and young people, and
- provides children and young people with better learning opportunities and recreational activities for long term development.

Partnership initiatives include: parenting information and support service; parenting magazine; domestic violence education strategy; and peer-facilitated parenting education network providing education, support, and counselling.

The initiatives of the Pacific Partnership are delivered through the regional offices of Government agencies and non-government organisations. Areas where Pacific communities are concentrated are targeted including:

- Sydney metropolitan area - where 84 per cent of all Pacific people in NSW live. Within the metropolitan area – Greater Western Sydney, including Campbelltown – is a key focus with 39 per cent of the State's Pacific population, and
- Rural population clusters in the Hunter, Griffith and Illawarra regions.

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Question No. 14

The Hon. John Ryan MLC asked the Minister for Community Services, and Minister for Youth:

Could you explain how we will deal with the shortage of university qualified early childhood teachers in New South Wales to ensure that there are sufficient numbers to make sure that our centres can stay licensed?

ANSWER:

It is acknowledged that there is a national shortage of qualified early childhood teachers, and I am aware that a small minority of services in NSW are unable to recruit a university qualified early childhood teacher.

In 2002, NSW introduced the Early Childhood Teacher Interim Policy which allows licensees who are having genuine difficulties in recruiting qualified early childhood teachers to employ staff who have other qualifications and are moving towards a tertiary qualification. This helps to maintain services for children, and encourages enrolment of staff in approved early childhood teaching courses.

NSW is working with the universities to increase the number of early childhood teacher training places available in NSW and is also working at the national level with the Commonwealth and other States and Territories to develop national strategies and solutions.



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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 15

The Hon John Ryan asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth:

Are you in receipt of a report relating to the Children's Employment Act (sic) that deals with the working of children's check (sic), a review of those arrangements? Do you have a report, what are its recommendations and what are you planning to do with it?

ANSWER:

The *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998* and the *Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998* have been operating for five years and are subject to a standard requirement in NSW legislation that they be reviewed.

The Government has considered the report of an independent review of the legislation and I expect to table the report and the Government's response in the near future.



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Date: 22 September 2005

Question No 16

The Hon John Ryan asked the Minister for Community Services and Minister for Youth:

Could the Minister provide the Committee with the reasons that the department has not accredited a not-for-profit adoption agency for intercountry adoption services?

ANSWER:

The accreditation provisions of the *Adoption Act 2000* took effect from 1 July 2005. Accreditation of agencies is undertaken by the Children's Guardian under delegation from the Department of Community Services.

The Guardian has developed standards to be met by prospective intercountry adoption service providers.

Any agency that seeks to provide intercountry adoption services can now apply to the Children's Guardian for accreditation.

To date, the Children's Guardian has not received any applications from organisations seeking to provide intercountry adoption services.



Reba Meagher MP
Minister for Community Services and Youth