

### **5.3 Deputy J.A. Martin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding looked-after children in the care of the States:**

How many looked-after children are currently in the care of the States including those in foster care and in homes and is responsibility for Children's Services delegated to either of the Assistant Ministers?

#### **Senator A.K.F. Green (The Minister for Health and Social Services):**

Currently at the end of September there are 88 looked-after children. Of these; 33 are in foster care, 24 have been placed with family or friends, 26 are in residential placements and 5 are placed with parents. Children's Services is so important that when I became Minister for Health and Social Services I made the decision not to continue the practice of delegating responsibility for the service to one of my Assistant Ministers. As Members will be aware, Children's Services is a high area of priority for my department and we are planning and are indeed investing significant levels of additional funding in increasing and improving Children's Services.

[10:00]

That is to ensure that the most vulnerable that are at risk are properly supported.

#### **5.3.1 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Supplementary. Since I first asked this question in 2000 or 2001 the number of looked-after children has been between 85 and 95. Would the Minister say that this is normal for this amount of population and also the head of the last children ... who was head of Children's Services before was very concerned about this being a constant figure for this amount of time? Has the Minister got any explanation for this please?

#### **Senator A.K.F. Green:**

I would have thought the Deputy, when she was Assistant Minister with responsibility for this area, during some of the time that she mentioned, would understand the challenge here. We have got more children in care than we would like to have but it is always for the best interests of the child. I cannot add any more to that. Always when considering whether to support a family and the child, because it is about supporting both, the best interests of the child is paramount; their safety, their development, their future. We do have more than we would like to have there. We are developing another service called the Edge Service, which will give more intensive support around families for children if they are appropriate but always the safety of the child comes first and the Deputy knows that.

#### **5.3.2 Deputy J.A. Hilton of St. Helier:**

The Minister has just informed Members that there are currently 26 children in residential placements. My understanding is we have not got 26 residential placements in the Island for children. Can he tell Members how many children are currently placed in the U.K. and is this as a direct result of a lack of suitable foster parents?

#### **Senator A.K.F. Green:**

Based on the figures I have got here I think, but I would like to check this, there are 20 children currently placed in the U.K. Of course, 2 of those are significantly large families.

#### **5.3.3 Deputy J.A. Hilton:**

In answer to the second part of my question, is part of the reason that we have such a high number of children placed in residential care in the U.K. because we simply do not have enough suitably qualified foster parents in the Island?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

The number of foster parents is a challenge and we are working to improve that but I can assure the Deputy that in the cases of 2 families, they are there because that service that they need, that specialist service - these are very damaged children - that service is not available in the Island.

**5.3.4 The Deputy of St. Ouen:**

What is the Minister's response to a Royal Court decision issued on 14th September, which expressed concern that looked-after children need to get know and trust their social workers, and that is not possible in circumstances where 5 social workers were appointed to them within a 12-month period?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

Great concern, and relationships are built up between children and between families and social workers and when it works you want to try and maintain that and that is why we have adjusted to being a little more flexible around the age limit so that social workers can go beyond the age of children into young adulthood. That said, we are having trouble recruiting. We have put 22 extra social workers in. Most of those are interim because we are struggling to attract people permanently to the Island.

**5.3.5 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Following on from Deputy Martin's supplementary question, could the Minister state how the Jersey figures compare with, for example, the U.K. figures in terms of percentage of population?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

I do not have that information available but I believe they are slightly higher in Jersey than they are in the U.K. but we are picking up a lot of legacy cases that need to be dealt with.

**5.3.6 Deputy M. Tadier:**

Does the Minister believe that there is a correlation between socioeconomic wellbeing, equality of income, et cetera, and the relatively high numbers of children in care in the Island?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

It is very difficult for me to say that because I do not believe, however difficult people might find life financially, which is what I think the Deputy was saying, there is any excuse for abuse or neglect of children.

**5.3.7 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier:**

The Minister said that there were 2 seriously damaged families in the U.K. Is he aware of how many other families within the Island need such support because I can certainly think of at least one?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

The decision to place a child in care or to seek specialist help in the U.K. or to intensively support a family has to be a matter for the professionals. It is not for me to say: "Well, I think that family should have that treatment and that family should have that." It has to be properly assessed by professionals at the appropriate time to ensure that the child is always at the centre of everything we do.

**5.3.8 Deputy M.R. Higgins:**

Just following up, the Minister did not answer the question. Is he aware of how many other families could do with the assistance that is being provided to these 2 families in the United Kingdom?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

No other families have been brought to my attention. It has to be a matter for the professionals to provide the appropriate treatment, whether it be in Jersey, whether it be wrapped around care with the family, whether it be in the U.K.

**5.3.9 Deputy R. Labey of St. Helier:**

The Minister will forgive me if I have missed an announcement on this by him but I wonder what have been the ramifications within the department of social workers moving the wrong child from school.

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

It is out of this question but I am happy to answer it. The social worker was not a social worker, it was a care assistant. They did not remove the wrong child from the school. They collected a child and they took that child to a prearranged appointment. They did not remove the child from the school.

**5.3.10 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

What incentives, if any, does the Minister have in place to improve recruitment and retention, particularly among the social work professionals?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

It is something we are looking at at the moment. We are fishing in a very small pool, to use the term, because the U.K. has the same problems but we are determined to fill our vacancies permanently because that relationship that Deputy Renouf was talking about is so important.

**5.3.11 Deputy G.P. Southern:**

Does the Minister not accept that that is symptomatic of the way in which we treat our professionals; teachers, nurses, medics and social workers and that unless we treat them better we are going to continue to have recruitment and retention problems in this area.

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

I am sorry, Deputy, that is not within the parameters of the question which is specific to Children's Services and not more generally to retention and recruitment. We have time for a question from Deputy Hilton and then a final supplementary from Deputy Martin.

**5.3.12 Deputy J.A. Hilton:**

Since the implementation of Williamson in 2008 the number of residential beds has decreased substantially, wrongly, in my view, because Williamson was relying on foster carers coming forward to look after children in care. Does the Minister believe that the time has come to increase the number of residential beds in the Island so that more Island children can be looked after in the Island rather than being sent away from their families, in the U.K.?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

As usual the Deputy always asks a very good question. It is something that I am looking at at the moment because I am concerned but that said, a significant number of those that are already placed in the U.K. could not ... they need more than residential care. They need significant

intensive treatment and support so in those cases it would not happen but I am concerned and we are looking at the residential placement.

**5.3.13 Deputy J.A. Martin:**

I totally agree with the Minister, this is exactly why I am asking the questions because, as I said, when I was the Assistant Minister with responsibility the new head of Children's Services said: "I would ask questions about the static number and the same amount of number that are in the care of the State", hence the question, and I will be coming back next year with the same question. Finally, the question is: how many heads of Children's Services have the department had since 2005 and is there a current person in place at the head of this service?

**Senator A.K.F. Green:**

I cannot answer the question completely but I can answer since I have been Minister, we had one interim who left, a permanent replacement was eventually found. Unfortunately she did not settle in Jersey and we have another acting person in place at the moment. That is something that is really exercising me because we have to get the right professional lead in place. So I agree with the Deputy.

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

So is that 3 in just under 2 years?

**The Deputy Bailiff:**

I am sorry, Deputy, that was the final supplementary.