



**Public Hearing of the
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION
WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2009
Questions on Notice**

5. *Could DIAC please provide an overview of the foster care arrangements on Christmas Island, including arrangements for children's education and any DIAC contribution to teaching resources on the island?*
(Hansard page reference: M22/23)

CARERS

The daily care for unaccompanied minors (UAMs) on Christmas Island (CI) is provided by *Life Without Barriers* (LWB), a national not-for-profit organisation who work to support children and young people in crisis, people with a disability, mental health issues and those from indigenous and other cultural backgrounds.

LWB provides their carers on CI with 24 hours per day, 7 days a week on-island monitoring, support and supervision through the establishment of Supporter of Carer (SOC) and Operations Manager roles. The SOC provides placement support and monitoring, while the Operations Manager provides placement supervision and program management.

Currently, carers have been working to a '4 weeks on, 2 weeks off' roster. However, LWB are considering an alternative model which could see the length of time that a carer spends on-island extend beyond 4 weeks. The alternative model is still under consideration by LWB.

Probity Screening

The LWB staff engaged to provide care for the young people on Christmas Island are paid professional carers, not foster carers. They are subject to a Working With Children Check¹ and the receipt on the Working With Children Check form shows proof of a pending application which means that the applicant may be employed in child related work whilst the application is in process.

Additionally, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) requires that LWB professional care providers and staff involved with the care of unaccompanied minors on Christmas Island undergo an Australian Federal Police check prior to their involvement with the Department's clients.

¹ A Working with Children Check is a state legislative requirement in Western Australia that pertains to professional persons in child-related work in Western Australia, Christmas Island and Cocos Island: Working with Children [Criminal Record Checking] Act 2004.

Assessment and Training

LWB ensures that professional carers receive assessment and training opportunities akin to their foster carer counterparts in Western Australia. An outline of that process is provided, below:

All potential professional carers undergo an initial assessment process within a Department of Child Protection Western Australia framework, called *Step by Step*.

Once assessed and approved as suitable, potential professional carers proceed to a 2 day training program that introduces them to key aspects of the care of children and young people, as well as the initial training that LWB provide to carers, which covers the model of care. Professional carers are also trained in LWB policies and procedures (Western Australia).

Should a potential professional carer be deemed suitable through the assessment and training processes, their application proceeds to a LWB Panel for consideration.

The Panel considers the findings and makes a determination to approve the applicant to provide professional care, or not, as the case may be.

EDUCATION

All minors of school age attend the Christmas Island District High School.

DIAC contribution to educational resources

The Department initially agreed to fund Christmas Island District High School with 1 full-time teacher plus 0.5 of an Education Assistant, or the equivalent, for Semesters 1 and 2 in 2009. However, a subsequent request for an additional full-time teacher for Semester 1 2009 was approved. Therefore, the Department currently provides funds for 2 full-time teachers and 0.5 of a Teachers Assistant.

It was agreed that the ongoing need for the second teacher would be reviewed prior to the commencement of Semester 2.

As at 18 March 2009, the provision of teaching resources is the extent of the assistance agreed to between the Department and the school.

Education provided by Life Without Barriers

Life Without Barriers continues the unaccompanied minors' education and life-skills development through its care program. The program includes:

- Practical facilitation of English language skills, for example, labelling commonly used household items;
- Self care skills, for example, personal hygiene;
- Self management:
 - Use of household appliances and products;
 - Shopping/meal preparation skills which are integrated into household routines;
 - Handling Australian currency/understanding the Banking system;
 - Basic understanding of the Australian Taxation system;

- Operation of Postal Services;
- Introduction to the operation of Sporting Clubs and Associations, and
- Accessing agency and health services.