

Carer Recognition Act 2010

To Whom It May Concern

The definition for carer (under the Australian Government Carer Recognition Act 2010) is someone who gives care and support to a relative or friend who: has a disability. has a medical condition (terminal or chronic illness) has a mental illness. is frail because they are old (known as 'frail and aged')

I am a 64 year old Grandmother who has court orders that give me custody of my two granddaughter. I had to give up my employment as a paid carer/support worker to look after the children who were and still are traumatised by drug affected and domestic abuse parents. My extended family all live interstate. My friends are my age or older and either work, retired and travel or enjoy spending time with their own grandchildren.

Under the definition for carer, I identify with the “relative” part, but children with trauma do not seem to fit under the other headings. Initially at the age of 5 years, the NDIS eventually with a lot of pleaded put them under the category of “early childhood development”, when they turned 7 years they were put under “psychosocial” heading. Then when they turned 8 they are rejected and I was told to go to the doctors to get a mental health plan for the children, which I did not understand then as I did not realise that Traumatized came under the heading of Mental Health.

1. All Carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians, regardless of age, race, sex, disability, sexuality, religious or political beliefs, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage, cultural or linguistic differences, socioeconomic status or locality.

This principle sounds good in word/theory, but does not work in practice. Thus the problem.

Same Rights. - More information is needed to assist Grandparents Carers navigate the system. The information out there is not detailed enough. A lot of Grandparents are NOT computer savvy, so more information needs to be in booklet form. Even with computers trying to navigate information available, we simply do not have the time it takes to try and find what we need.

Carers having to navigate different government and non government support systems for Trauma children, depends on age, and what heading they come under then availability.

Choices. - I was not informed through Booklet information or by Child Protection that I could become a Kinship Carer, thereby being able to receive more support through Child Protection. Instead I had to navigate the court system to the tune of a \$12,000 caveat put on my home. Four years of affidavit and travel to Adelaide for court.

Again more easy to understand, detailed with information giving choices eg option 1, option 2, option 3, needs to be given to out. Centrelink (Services Australia), Doctors, Pediatrician should be given information to hand out, and explain it, as they are the first places we take ourselves and our children when they come into our care.

A Centrelink Grandparent, Foster and Kinship Carers Adviser in ALL Centrelink offices, with also information booklets who could sit down with us and talk through options for people like me would have and still would help me, financially and emotionally giving me the choices I need. That way as new and updated services and information develop we “The Carers” and “Grandparents” would have a local go to person.

2. Children and young people who are Carers should have the same rights as all children and young people and should be supported to reach their full potential.
3. The valuable social and economic contribution that Carers make to society should be recognised and supported.

Unless we are employed, Carers cannot make an economic contribution to society. Even then, a lot of their disposable income and superannuation is taken up with supporting the person/people they are caring for. Social contributions are virtually nil, as they use up all their Care support resources, working. Therefore have no resources left for a social life.

Children Protection did not give me any options so, I felt had to give up work or hand over the children to Child Protection to put into foster care. I was not told about Kinship Care.

If the child/ren are diagnosed with a disability then the Carer becomes according to Centrelink a "Carer" and get put on a Carers pension and is recognised as the Carer. There is a certain amount of support, through the NDIS. They can usually get support workers and other supports.

In our local area we have;

- Regional disability services NDIS
- (Township) Regional disability services NDIS
- Carers and Disability Link NDIS and Carers
- (Bapcare) NDIS Local Area Co-ordinator
- Maxima Employment NDIS
- Sureway Employment NDIS
- My Support Loop NDIS
- CAHMS (only severe mental health)
- Country and Outback Health (age limited) are not Care providers
- United Country SA (are not Care Providers, but have support)
- United Care Services NDIS

My Grandchildren are not diagnosed with a condition, so while under 8 years I was put on a Parenting Payment, with a Pension Card, then over 8 years put on Employment or Youth and Student Assistance Services (Job Seeker) with a Pension Card, who has to report every fortnight, a once a year to say they still have the children in my care and one a year to gain an exemption to not have to look for work. Some correspondence from Centrelink says "to the Carer". I am also unable to get finance due to being classed as unemployed.

So socially and economically I am not classed as the "Carer" of my Granddaughters. Until 2 years ago after a meltdown and going door to door of every agency in my township someone from an NDIS agency contacted an organisation to see if they could give me support (one that I use to work for, but could not support me initially because Centrelink did not class me as a carer). Eventually, 4 years after the children came to me, I found out about Carers Gateway, both organisations now class me as a Carer, Centrelink still does not.

Centrelink contact information phone lines say "Grandparent, Foster and Kinship Carer Adviser Line."

Am I a Carer or am I not a Carer!!!!

4. Carers should be supported to enjoy optimum health and social wellbeing and to participate in family, social and community life.

The agencies that the Government is putting so much money into funding, relocating premises, with more setting up costs should be made more accountable for this principle to be effective. Once again information is the key and if these agencies are NOT supplying information or not in an appropriate timely manner, then the system will not work to the advantages of the Carers they are supposed to be set up for.

For the first 2 years when my grandchildren came to live with me, this could not be done. I could not get support from any agency. Did not get advice/information from any medical practice. Since the children have settled into school I can now enjoy some daytime social life and voluntary work.

Carers SA have offered me time out coffee/ outings once a month, which with school children need to be co-ordinated with their school times. Carers SA also offered respite care events/ weekends with supportive funding. I asked to go on a weekend retreat as I was exhausted, they had a lot of day/weekend outings and retreats on offer. It took months to be **disapproved** for funding, then 5 minutes after the disapproved funding, an email came through to say Welcome, you have been accepted for the wellbeing retreat. Can you imagine my disappointment, then came the anger, then came the defeat and depression.

Next time I asked for a weekend off. They negotiated for a couple of hours during the day, and eventually one overnight. The funding was approved. Yaaa, then a couple of weeks later I was informed they could not get a carer to look after the children. Try a third time. Funding was approved for only one night and they had to pay for a Carer/Support Worker to drive 150km each way to come and stay with the children.

Under NDIS you can get anyone who is registered with NDIS to look after children. Under Carers SA/Gateway the person has to come through an agency. If Carers SA/Gateway opened up to the same conditions as NDIS it would have been easier to get someone qualified to look after the children, so I could get some overnight/weekend respite care.

Please remember I am now 64 years old, and this was NOT a career choice.

5. Carers should be acknowledged as individuals with their own needs within and beyond the caring role.

You need to be classed as a "Carer" to be acknowledged in the first place.

I have always been "ACKNOWLEDGED". Usually with a person who really means it when they say "They Understand". Sometimes I get the protective person "Who Thinks The Money Is Coming Out of Their Pockets", then you get the "Pacifier" With the "there, there". They all acknowledge that I am the grandmother raising my granddaughters.

This principle needs to have the "acknowledged" followed by an ACTION word, because without the ACTION, being Acknowledged is useless to a CARER who is desperately trying to find time, space, money, and someone to give them respite, so that they CAN fulfil some of their own needs within and beyond the caring role.

6. The relationship between Carers and the persons for whom they care should be recognised and respected.
7. Carers should be considered as partners with other care providers in the provision of care, acknowledging the unique knowledge and experience of Carers.

- Carers and Disability Link now have coffee mornings, occasional lunch and outing once a month for Carers and a young Carers Program. This is the same agency I use to work for who refused me as Centrelink does not class me as a Carer. Carers Gateway now have coffee mornings and occasional lunch once a month for Carers of a certain age.

8. Carers should be treated with dignity and respect.

Carers Gateway have a 5 star assessment system every time a Carer needs support. The system of phone calls is time consuming and focuses on how the Carer is feeling on the day of the phone appointment. Some of the workers are understanding and compassionate. Others treat us like a number in the system, with lack of understanding of what I have been through that day, week, month or year. The system is flooded. It is a labyrinth of phone calls. First to make contact for an appointment. Gateway then call back to confirm an appointment time. The phone appointment itself. Then months later a confirmation or denial of the finance or circumstances for the initial phone call. This needs to be better streamline. All these phone calls take a lot of time.

At the end of the services provided I was sent a Statement to say how much money I was allocated less the cost of the gardener and less the cost of the worker who looked after the children for a night. The statement has the balance, which was below the limit and reclaimed by Carers Gateway. At no time have I been told how much money I was eligible to receive. So I don't know if I have any money available for any services without having to undergo the above phone calls every time. If I need a service/s again I need to do another Star assessment. Once again this differs from NDIS where they send the information about the 12 month package and how much I can use on each service needed.

9. Carers should be supported to achieve greater economic wellbeing and sustainability and where appropriate, should have opportunities in employment and education.

Under Centrelink I do receive child care/OSCH to assist with this Principal.

10. Support for Carers should be timely, responsive, appropriate and accessible.

Through Carers Gateway;

- Asking for a gardener as the garden has got out of control. Two months later you may get a gardener, by that time the grass is so high. Where are the children suppose to pay in that time. Last time I asked for a gardener, I asked for the specific gardener by name who I had used through the Gateway the year before. When I did not receive a timely response I contacted the Gateway, to be informed that maybe he was busy and/or unavailable. When I reported to the person over the phone that I had been in contact with the gardener and he was available when I rang him 4 weeks earlier after I had spoken to the Gateway, they said they would look into it. The gardener was contacted the next day, and came to see me within the next 2 days.
- If you ask for a cleaner it's because for certain reasons you are not coping with the house work. You need help straight away, but have to keep trying to cope the next two months until funding is approved, then more time for a worker is found and booked.

The time frame of these services needs to be shortened.

So what is working. The 10 key principles work in words, not action.

Service providers can write up their Aims and Objectives, but everything is conditional, to age, disability and how Government, State and Federal view and promote Carers like myself, who have given up our social, economical, emotional lives to look after our Grandchildren/relatives. Information and Time are our two valueable commodities. We do not have a lot of either. My very small local primary school has been more supportive and informative that any of the government agencies.

Also the definition of Informal Carer and the name Formal“Carer” (who is actually a support worker) supporting a person or the persons' Carer should be changed.

A person who is paid an income to assist (support) a person, who they do not look after 24/7 should be called a “Support Worker” not a Carer as it creates a lot of confusion.

Thankyou for taking the time to read this and I hope that change can be made for myself and future Grandparents who give up their independent year to raise their grandchildren.