

This submission is in relation to my experience with Centrelink DSP granting & review process. My year old son, Mr K, is currently in receipt of the Disability Support Pension (DSP). Mr K was granted DSP in 2011 after he turned .

The process of being granted DSP was traumatic for my son & I. Mr K suffers from Autistic Spectrum Disorder & Avoidant / Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (all of which are diagnosed by Psychiatrists). Although at in 2011, Mr K's disability was severe he did not need regular medical attention. His behavioural and functional issues were managed primarily through school based intervention services, none of which had the qualification necessary to complete DSP, or carers payment forms. At the time of applying for DSP, Mr K had not seen a medical doctor for 3 years. Leaving home and going to unfamiliar places with strangers, caused Mr K severe distress, created safety issues for himself & others, so it was avoided unless a absolute necessary.

Given Mr K's lack of medical contact, I contacted Centrelink to find out what options there were for people who did not have a Dr to fill in the DSP medical form or who did not have much medical evidence to provide. After months of numerous phone calls & weeks of being giving contradictory information (even being told to Doctor shop) we were grated an appointment with a Centrelink employed Senior Psychologist. The Psychologist administered an I.Q test & a functional ability test. A process that was almost 3 hours long & resulted in Mr K biting & hitting himself on the way home.

In short, the resulting written report from the Centrelink Psychologist stated that:

Although Mr K did not have a low IQ (which means he does not meet manifest criteria), his ability to function on a day to day basis was in the bottom 1% of the population. He has extreme difficulty remembering to eat properly, dress himself, shower, he did not answer the phone or read mail, had issues recognising people ect. This was all due to the severity of his condition. The report also stated that Mr K's condition would likely remain unchanged for the rest of his life & that Mr K was vulnerable as he had no capacity to for-fill any Centrelink requirements. Mr K was immediately granted DSP. In 2014 after Mr K started seeing a doctor regularly due to worsening of his eating condition, I was finally able to get forms filled in to be granted Carers payment/ allowance. At the time, I thought this would be the end our Centrelink assessments for a long while.

However, in 2015 MR K's DSP came up for review due to the Governments 2014 -15 reassessment of under 35's. I returned the requested medical form that Mr K's GP filled out to Centrelink . At the time we received the review Mr K had recently been hospitalised due to life threatening issues caused by his eating disorder. Mental Health were trying to get him back into hospital to be force fed. I phoned Centrelink and requested a phone interview or a file assessment & was told that despite the circumstances Mr K was still required to attend a Face to Face Job Capacity interview. I pointed out to Centrelink that they had already paid a Psychologist to assess my son, who had said his disability would likely remain unchanged for the rest of his life. I also told them they had a lot of very recent medical information because a doctor had filled out the carers application. I was told despite all this there were no exemptions or file assessments & that he had to have a face to face interview.

After weeks of sleepless nights & violent failed attempts of getting Mr K to attend a Centrelink office 60kms away I put in a written complaint to the Chief Executive & General Manager Centrelink, Department of Human Services . After this, I was granted a phone interview with (thankfully) the same Centrelink employed Psychologist who had seen my son at . He remembered us well & given what was going on in my sons life at the time, it was relief to talk to someone who already had an understanding. I doubt we will be this lucky in future reviews as that particular Psychologist is unlikely to remain employed there for my sons lifetime. How much did it cost the tax payer to again have the same Centrelink paid Psychologist state what Centrelink already knew and he had said 3 years earlier. We have not been sent a review notice for this latest review, however I live in constant fear, if its not this review it will be the next.

My issues in regards to the DSP granting & review process are:

1. There is no suitable & effective means of fairly assessing those whose disability does not require regular medical contact. Many disabilities especially if stable & permanent require no or very little ongoing medical intervention. Its disturbing & discriminatory that the government believes all disabilities are needing ongoing medical care so it should be easy to supply medical evidence.
2. The symptoms of some disabilities prevent people accessing medical care even if needed &

thus being able to provide Centrelink with medical information to be assessed for DSP or to be reviewed. Not everyone has someone to help them. According to my local State Department of Communities contact person, there are several people in our small town sleeping in the streets & stealing to survive because they don't have the mental capacity or emotional resilience to follow the ever changing DSP conditions. How many genuine people in Australia are being denied DSP & slipping through the cracks?. There needs to be reasonable adjustments made in legislation & policy for people whose disability prevents compliance with medical evidence. The Government should have an effective system in place to check that their DSP review processes & Centrelink's handling of reviews does not unfairly cause distress to very vulnerable people. Proper follow up on what happens to those negatively affected by DSP reviews needs to be undertaken.

3. Centrelink should be able to undertake file assessments to eliminate the need for reviewing people they already have enough information on. Centrelink should be able to use discretion to grant case by case exemptions when it comes to blanket ordered reviews. Anyone reading my son's file should be aware there is little chance of there ever being any significant improvement & that a review causes foreseeable difficulties for him. The government via various departments, is constantly collecting the same evidence of a single persons disability for numerous reasons. My son has a Government issued Companion Card because he needs a care person when ever he leaves home. This was granted after medical evidence was supplied. We have had to have assessments/reassessments & supply evidence for NDIS & State Disability services ect ect. It feels like a large part of my life has become about proving disability severity to Governments again..again and again. Centrelink should be able to take into account other factors, not just medical evidence. For example my sons Companion Card shows he needs a carer out in public. His Government Disability funding goes towards paying for him to attend a Day program in a special Centre for only those with severe disabilities. If you were to correlate all of the information from all sources, Government has on my son, it would be very clear that he has not become (nor ever will become) suddenly capable of working & frauding the system.
4. The cost of providing medical reports or copies of medical files/test results is a significant burden & prohibitive to many disabled persons. A report from my sons Psychologist is \$800, Occupational therapist \$345, Psychiatrist \$150 (out of pocket after Medicare). Copies of my

sons file from the G.P is \$1 per page. It can take months (or longer) to get appointments with specialists. Appointments just for the purpose of obtaining reports/copies of files for Centrelink, increase waiting times & take medical help away from those who really need it for health reasons.

5. People (including myself) have been granted carers payment due to the constant severity & high care needs of the care receiver. In order to be granted carers payment, the disability must be assessed by Centrelink as severe & the carer must be providing in home daily care that would amount to the same hours as a full time job . Yet despite the fact Centrelink know care receivers are getting this much care, the care receivers DSP is getting reviewed to see if they are able to go out & work. If someone needs 6 hours of daily care in their own home & their disability is severe for Carers payment purpose, how could they work for DSP purposes? Are carers expected to go with them to a job to provide care there? What does reviewing these people with already known high care needs & severe disabilities achieve.....other then wasted tax payer monies & psychological & financial stress of the care receiver & carer.

On the following page is a copy to my complaint letter Chief Executive & General Manager which was sent when Mr K was reviewed in **Attachment A**

## **Attachment A**

### **Attention: Chief Executive & General Manager Centrelink, Department of Human Services**

I am writing in regards to my      year old son Mr K. Mr K suffers from Autism which severely affects his ability to function on a day to day basis. I care for Mr K full time as he is unable to live independently. Mr K has little insight into his condition. Due to behavioral and severe social issues, Mr K needs a carer to accompany him if he leaves our home.

Mr K was granted the Disability Support Pension (DSP) in 2011, which is now under review. In

            I submitted a medical review form and a statement (included at the end of this letter) from myself about Mr K issues. I was granted Carer Allowance & Payment last year for Mr K, so Centrelink also have other recent medical information on Mr K high care needs.

I received a letter saying that Mr K must attended a 'Face to Face' interview on the                      at the (town removed) office, 67klms from my home. I do not drive due to a disability and there is no public transport, so I am reliant on friends for transport into (town removed). Due to Mr K's current fragile emotional state and the physical difficulty that I am having getting Mr K to attend essential medical appointments, I rang Centrelink (                      ) to see if I could change the appointment to a phone interview. Mr K does not have a physical disability that needs to be inspected, so I figured there would be little difference between a face to face or over the phone interview. I offered to get more medical information if necessary for a phone interview or a file assessment. Mr K's last Job Capacity Assessment lists him as vulnerable to noncompliance due to the severity of his disability. However long story short I was told on the phone that due to Centrelink policy all DSP review appointments must now be conducted face to face and that there is no exemptions or alternative to this.

My complaint is that Centrelink are unwilling or unable to now offer a reasonable adjustment (such as phone interviews, file assessments) for Mr K and other vulnerable customers whose disabilities genuinely may prevent them from attending an office for a face to face interviews.

I would appreciate a timely written response to my complaint as Mr K is at risk of getting his payment canceled. I had no choice but to make another face to face appointment (                      ), even

though I may not be able to get Mr K too attended. I may also contact the Ombudsman and the Australian Human Rights Commission about this issue, if so I would like to include your written response to this letter. I personally feel victimised, as I am already having trouble coping in regards to getting Mr K to his health appointments, so do not this stress at this time. I also feel that Mr K has been treated unfairly because Centrelink has refused to provide a reasonable adjustment to help Mr K comply with DSP interview requirements.

Looking forward to your response,  
Mother of Mr K