

To whom it may concern

In 2022 My husband and I took our 10-year-old granddaughter into our care. The child had been removed by the DCP from a toxic home environment where she had been subjected to abuse and trauma over many years.

At the time we were told there were two options, she would become a ward of the state – it was underlined that this would be a far from positive outcome – or we could take custody. Naturally we went the custody route. This took 18 months and cost many thousands of dollars.

We were offered NO support of any kind.

We organised counselling for her and over the many months that followed enrolled her in different activities intended to a) give her a view of a world where she might flourish, and b) offer her an outlet for her energy and a way of making friends. These were all very expensive but we felt they were important for her to develop some self-esteem. We found the job we had been given extremely difficult. Constant bouts of screaming reduced us to emotional wrecks. Her counsellor eventually realised we had been set to the task of raising a child with no supports of any kind and it was her persistent efforts that resulted in some short-term help from two agencies dealing with trauma.

Eventually we realised that she was impacted by more than trauma, and she has since been diagnosed with ASD. This realisation was a turning point for us. We understood that we had in front of us a lifetime of counselling and occupational therapies and there was no likelihood of respite for us.

At the same time our granddaughter was growing fast and maturing so that we have to replace clothes, underwear and shoes every few months. She is approaching her menses which is likely to bring with it not just extra costs but also extra stress. She will need ongoing psychological help for the rest of her life. There are still many times when she loses control entirely and screams for such prolonged periods of time that we feel beyond anxious. We are 60 and 72. Currently our finances are directed almost entirely to her needs. We have paid for dental treatment – a plate – and expect the cost of braces to follow as well as regular dental treatment. School fees, excursions, uniforms etc are significant despite her attending a public school. We have not been able to secure a school card to help cover some of those costs. Health insurances had to be upgraded. These are just some of the costs associated with raising a pre-teen with ASD and trauma.

It is our belief that we have taken on the responsibility of the government by assuming her custody. Had we known we could become kinship carers there would have been some form of payment to us.

We love our grandchild and would not wish her to be anywhere else than with us. The costs of raising her are significant and ongoing and we do not expect them to lessen at any time. In fact, we expect we will have to use our superannuation to cover these. As well we both require counselling ourselves to deal with our stress and anxiety. We may be in a fortunate situation in that we own our own home and have income but that does not reduce in

anyway the knowledge that there will be no holidays, new cars, or small luxuries we might have expected after a full working life.

Having joined a grandparent carer group we are fully aware that others have even more dire circumstances. In our group there are carers as old as 84 dealing with adult grandchildren with severe mental health issues. There are single parents who have taken on the role of carers of multiple grandchildren while on a pension. There are women who are suicidal owing to the burden of care. Some continue to fight their own children in court attempting to secure custody at the cost of many, many thousands of dollars. A number have been assaulted, stalked and terrorised by angry parents who will not accept their children have been removed. None have had any financial support from the government.

I understand governments are not holding purses that refill like the magic pudding. I know there are limits to all welfare but I firmly believe the needs of carers have been pushed aside; after all, kind men and women are willingly taking on the costs, the stress, the pain and the daily anxieties of care that the government would have otherwise been forced to accept.

The system is broken. It needs urgent overhaul.
I commend this work to your committee.