

A major aspect in the progress and survival of Australian families is economic fairness and justice. Implied in this is the readily available option of free, genuine choice in parental management of family financial affairs, particularly in relation to the ongoing growth and development of their children.

These principles are especially applicable in Child Care. Among the greatest anomalies in the effective functioning of family life today is the federal government's generous economic provisions for children in Child Care Centres and extremely restrictive financial provisions for parents, particularly mothers who choose to care full-time for their children at home.

Not only have I seen and felt this dichotomy in my own observation and experience. There is also a wealth of authoritative research to show that children develop emotionally and psychologically far better under the direct, intimate care of their parents or someone freely chosen by them than they do in subsidised Child Care, where there is not the same depth of intimacy and affection between staff and children in their care.

One only needs to study the findings of the renowned expert and Australian author, Steve Bidduph, on the experiences of children in Child Care. His research has shown that if mothers were given the FREE CHOICE rather than driven by economic necessity into the paid workforce, the majority would choose to care for their children at home.

If mothers were offered a realistic basic income in the form of a 'Homemaker's Allowance' (not merely as a welfare payment) they would have a real option to be able to freely choose whether to be in the paid workforce or at home giving their children the daily, human, parent-child contact they essentially need. All the reliable research shows that Public Child Care can never totally and effectively replace this need.

Therefore, the most urgent, practical issue in this Inquiry is the establishment of economic justice by offering all mothers REAL, INDEPENDENT CHOICE between caring for their children at home or putting them in a Child Care Centre while they work.

I entreat the Inquiry Committee to urge the government to establish a realistic 'Homemaker's Allowance' so as to make genuine, free, parental choice reality.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Phillips