

## Submission No. 1052

(Inq into better support for carers)

June 18 2008

Noeleen

Secretary  
 Inquiry into Better Support for Carers  
 Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and youth  
 PO Box 6021  
 House of Representatives  
 Parliament House  
 CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

**I wish to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Housing and Youth's Inquiry into Better Support for Carers.**

I am a sole carer for my son aged 20 yrs who was diagnosed with Aspergers at a time when there was very little for support available through either the education system or disability services. My role in supporting my son has meant that I have had to watch his self-esteem deteriorate to the point of clinical depression as the current system continues to ignore his special needs. Without my support my son would be open to influence from undesirable peer group pressure and unable to function in a positive way in the community. I believe that my contribution to society should be recognized through education of communities, health providers, Government agencies and employers about the important role that carers play in looking after the vulnerable people in their community. I understand that carers save the Government millions of dollars each year in care and accommodation that they would otherwise be obliged to provide. Surely carers are entitled to some of this money being channeled to better supporting carers in their caring role!!!

With regard to employment barriers, in the past I have managed to work in part-time jobs however, inevitably was either retrenched or had to resign due to the juggling act between my caring role and my work commitments. This placed a great strain on me not only financially but emotionally which added to the frustration of having to negotiate periods of conflict and crisis; endeavoring to maintain my caring role and find ways to cope with and manage stress.

My son is currently keen to find employment but realistically there are no appropriate employment options for someone with Aspergers in this town. My son has accessed disability employment services in the past but there has been no specific training provided to assist him to enter the workforce. He has also attempted to gain an apprenticeship without success. Usually there is one criteria or another that precludes him from accessing any form of funded assistance and so he remains in limbo.

Like most carers financially I struggle to make ends meet. Being on the carers payment is enough to see me through from fortnight to fortnight on the basic necessities like rent, power and basic food however, there is not enough for private insurance, doctors visits (they do not bulk bill), maintenance on my vehicle --which I rely heavily on, or even savings in the bank for example.

Due to the cost of living in Mackay presently I am employed on a part-time basis (mostly 15hrs per week). This gives me a little pocket money to buy clothes, shoes and a few niceties like some brand name food, however, due to the necessity of using my vehicle to travel to and from work and the price of fuel; it is most times hardly worth it! Since the mining boom rents in this town have skyrocketed and there is insufficient housing to cater for the rapid increase in population. It is the vulnerable members of our community that this impacts on mostly. Mining companies have been allowed to open mines indiscriminately without being required to provide infrastructure and housing for their workers prior to opening. Bridges and roads are being made to accommodate them but nothing is being done for the local people who are suffering as a result. Currently there are scores of empty apartment buildings in Mackay owned by people interstate but no housing for people on the lower end of the economic scale!!

Economically, one of my biggest concerns is what happens when I come of retirement age and I have no or little super to cover me? I was born after the government cut-off for the age pension and there is little to back me up. I – like anyone else, do have the dream of the security of owning my own home and being able to not only support myself but my family also. For me to achieve this I would have to find higher paying full time employment which would mean more training and I would have to find alternative care for my son.

In terms of strategies I believe that employers need to be provided with more government incentive to employ carers and/or people with disabilities. Support for kids with Aspergers through the job interview process and initially on the job would build confidence in their ability to access and maintain employment.

There needs to be better recognition for workers in the community sector through increases in award wages in order to retain professional and qualified staff and increase the status of this type of work, this includes better training and pay for support workers.

There needs to be broader community education encompassing recognition and respect for carers and the people they are caring for. A good place to start is in the primary school system, this may also help to alleviate bullying at school of kids who are different.

Any issues involving vulnerable members in the community are social issues not just government issues and need to be addressed with that in mind. Councils need to be more involved and responsible in fostering a community which supports its vulnerable members. Perhaps government could be active in initiating such action!

Thank you for taking time to listen to reality from a carers perspective. I hope that this information does not fall on deaf ears and that it is used to make our community a better place for all!

Without Prejudice

Noeleen