

INQUIRY INTO BETTER SUPPORT FOR CARERS

I would like to preface my remarks by saying that I **was** a carer for 25 years. My role ceased 16 years ago and I still, to this day, carry the scars from my experience.

To my mind the Inquiry into Better Support for Carers and the Pension Review are inseparable.

I would like to say at the beginning that the "Terms of Reference" seem to have a ring of unreality about them. Choice is something most carers don't have! Working is a choice that most carers don't have! Rest and recreation is a choice most carers don't have! Sufficient support is something most carers don't have! The same range of opportunities as the wider community is something most carers don't have! Transition into the caring role is something most carers don't have, transition, in most cases comes out of the blue and as for the future, who can tell, in many cases, how far off that might be!

Each Carer today saves the community both in monetary terms and human resources a debt that is totally unpayable.

To keep one person in Nursing home care or any other form of care costs approximately \$180 to \$240 per day depending on the needs of the person. Therefore in round terms this would cost the taxpayer between \$65,520 and \$87,360 per year. Therefore every carer is saving the community this amount. With roughly 4 to 5 thousand carers that agencies are aware of in Victoria alone, if you multiply that number of carers with the yearly cost per person you are looking at figures of somewhere around \$328 million to \$437 million for Victoria. For Australia it comes to a staggering \$2 billion 299million to \$3 billion 66 million.

Those figures are just the cost in monetary terms, what about the cost in human terms.

These cost in the health and wellbeing of the carer.

The cost of 35000 carers who do not have the freedom and social interaction that is taken for granted by the rest of the Community.

To be a carer you commit your life to the role. You have to be totally selfless and along with the stress emotionally, physically and socially this can have a lasting and detrimental effect on the health of a carer. It is the cost of **love** and it has no price.

Respite is a high priority although this can also be difficult emotionally on both the carer and the cared for. It can become very difficult in some cases to be apart. Instances that come to mind is where the person has a form of dementia, where it can be disorientating for both and emotionally draining for the carer or where the person being cared for is a child. It can sometimes seem easier not to have respite unless it can be provided **in the home**.

As to helping carers find and/or retain employment, in the majority of cases I would think that the workload they already have physically is astronomical let alone the emotional stress, to expect them to continue in that role **and** hold down a job at the same time is ludicrous.

When you are caring for someone with constant needs, friends tend to disappear, they are unsure how to handle the situation and feel uncomfortable and disturbed. Perhaps educating the community is one way of combating this. Maybe the way to start this is in primary school where children can be introduced to people with disabilities, medical conditions and frailties. Young children have a wonderful capacity to see the person not their condition and they also have a disarming way of asking questions. **Start early and change lives.**

For carers to make choices (if they are fortunate enough to be able to do so) within their caring roles first and foremost they need the means to do so and without sufficient financial security it is impossible.

In fact a substantial increase in the pension is urgently needed for food, clothing, medicines (which I believe should be **Free**, petrol, electricity, gas, water, in fact I can't think of anything that hasn't risen enormously within the last few years and in particular the last few months and the CPI rises are a joke, albeit a bad joke.

It is time for household help to be provided **FREE** to carers by properly trained staff who are aware of the fragility of the carer both physically and emotionally and who are trained to provide support in these areas also.

Free nursing support in the home is also a vital component that should be provided to relieve both the physical and financial burdens placed on carers.

All carers have individual needs and these need to be addressed taking into account what the carers feel is essential to their well being and that of their family.

Any workers who have the privilege of entering Carer's homes should also be well trained to listen, I mean **really listen**, because it is only by doing this that needs that are overlooked can begin to be met.

If a carer should fulfil their role and their caring days come to an end it would be nice to think that the Government would say "THANK YOU" by providing them at that point with a well earned all expenses paid holiday. It doesn't seem a lot to ask!

Retirement is something some carers can only dream of. Many will continue in their role until they become too ill themselves or die, particularly when the cared for is a child or a spouse. I have seen this happen in my own family. Frankly, I don't know what the answer is to this situation apart from the fact that some sort of fund should be established to provide money to supplement the pension or that could at the very least provide full time help in the home at retirement age.

I have really only begun to scratch the surface of the needs and anomalies that face carers today. My caring days are over, but my heart goes out to all those 35,000 or more carers who are doing it so tough today and I am so pleased the Government are looking to address the problems, lets hope that the result of this inquiry will be well baked and not half baked.

Helen