



From: Belinda Fenney-Walch [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 8 April 2005 5:04 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)
Subject: Inquiry into balancing work and family

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for holding this Inquiry. I am disappointed in the small number of submissions you have uploaded to your website to date given how big an issue "balancing work and family" is to the majority of Australian families. I suspect there are two reasons why there are so few submissions:

1. Hardly anyone knows this Inquiry is underway - I have mentioned this Inquiry to many of my friends over the last week and not one of them knew it was under way.
2. Most working families are so busy, they don't have time to sit down and write submissions. Yes, they could make time, but that would mean robbing further time from their children. When one works full time and has children, in our experience every second of spare time is spent catching up on quality time with the children.

We use child care so that I can work part time while my husband works full time. Until we had our third child I worked full time, but I had to cut back to part time work because:

- a). we found the cost of child care (plus the cost of extra petrol, parking, work clothes) meant that it was not financially sensible for us both to work full time; and
- b). even if we could afford the child care, we could only get two days a week care for our toddler .

I don't just work to get an income. I enjoy work. I am a professional, I have career aspirations and goals, and I love the challenge of work, just as I love being a parent - but I am only able to work two days per week because I am also a parent.

We have three beautiful children who are all in childcare as follows:

- One 18 month old - two full days per week
- 5 year old - one morning and one afternoon
- 7 year old - five hours of at After School Care (two afternoons)

We pay out of our pocket around \$500 per month for this small amount of care.

What we find discriminatory and incredible is the fact that we can not claim the cost of child care as a tax deduction. Out of my part time salary, I pay around \$6,000 per year in child care. This means I bring home \$6,000 less from my wage than I would if I did not have to pay for child care.

We are eligible for virtually no government assistance (and what we are eligible for goes into paying our Family Assistance Office debt!). But if child care was tax deductible, as well as the significant tax breaks we would also become eligible for significantly more assistance through the Family Assistance Office. I find it strange that this inequity is given so little attention. The amount the FAO provides families is dependent on their family income. But it doesn't take into

consideration that for families using child care, their *take home income* is thousands and thousands of dollars less than FAO assesses it as! The various family benefits were introduced because Government recognised that families need assistance. But those families paying for child care are missing out on assistance that, on their *take home salary*, they should be eligible for. Given the fact working families also have higher petrol, parking and clothing costs, why are they eligible for **less** family assistance than others bringing home the equivalent amount of money? Why are we penalised for working hard? We calculated last year that if my husband turned down the promotion he was offered and instead went part time, we would be financially better off! The extra government assistance plus the reduced child care costs would put us in front financially! This must be contributing to the poverty cycle in Australia - it costs families so much to go to work - often more than their wages - so parents decide to stay home. Children miss out on valuable role models, of watching their mother and father going to work. And parents find themselves making the wrong long term career decisions, for short term financial gains.

Of course this is only an issue for those in Australia lucky enough to have child care! My one year old has been on the waiting list for full time care since December 2003 (I could not put her on the waiting list earlier, as she is adopted and December 03 is when she was allocated to us), yet we are still only able to get 2 days per week care and I have no choice in which two days they are.

It is incredible that Australia faces a skills shortage in many occupations, yet many parents either can not afford to work because of the cost of child care, or are not able to work because they are unable to access childcare.

It is no wonder fewer Australians are having children. For many it is a choice - career or children. It is very hard to combine both.

Another major concern I have is the low value placed on child care. Child care is one of the lowest paid occupations in Australia. What value are we placing on our children? Obviously not much. Child carers are not baby sitters and should not be paid like baby sitters. Research has shown that the early years of life (0-4, with emphasis on 0-2) are the most important in terms of a person's development. Experiences in childhood set the foundation for health, development and wellbeing throughout a person's life. Because of this I believe child care should be considered part of the education system and valued as such. And I believe we should be aiming to attract the best possible carers to this work, through better pay and conditions.

Thank you for considering this.

Regards,

Belinda

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