

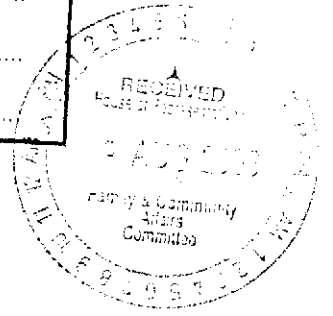
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Family and Community Affairs

Submission No: 337

Date Received: 6-8-03

Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs  
Child Custody Arrangements Inquiry  
Department of the House of Representatives'  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing in response to Nicola Rixon MP call for submissions of views regarding contact arrangements after separation.

The experience regarding child contact arrangements post separation has been ongoing for me for the last 8 years. In 1997 after separating and living under the one roof with my (then) husband I registered as s sole parent with Centrlleink.

I separated and lived under the same roof, as I couldn't afford to leave the family home. I had been to court to try and remove my husband due to violence within the marriage but this was unsuccessful. The Magistrate told my husband to stop his behaviour and gave me the option to either stay within the marriage or to go and live in a women's refuge.

I chose to stay with a roof over my head, as I didn't want to be homeless with my then 2-½ year old in a women's refuge.

I was fortunate enough to be working and negotiated with my bank manager to secure a small unit to rent out until I could separate from my husband. During this separation under the one roof I had difficulties with childcare and work, as I could not get the support I needed to leave my husband and it took another 12 months before I could leave the family home and live in my small unit.

Once I moved I found there was no support or available childcare places so I could only work part-time. I also attempted to negotiate access visits for my child with my ex-husband and went to court in 1999 to finalise access orders.

This was done but my ex-husband did not adhere to these orders and I found it difficult to further my career as I was constantly being "left in the lurch" with childcare problems when he didn't turn up for access (so I couldn't work) and/or when I would finish work to pickup my son my ex-husband did not turn up/or/ he would turn up early so I couldn't go to work (leaving me to look after my child.)

I found this process of his erratic behaviour frustrating and frightening as at times when he refused to handover my son or just did not turn up the police would not assist me as it was a Federal Court matter. I did not have the funds or the time to go to court to charge him with breach of orders. (I was working shift work and had a mortgage).

My career was seriously affected by the inability to take promotions offered due to:

- Lack of childcare facilities outside of business hours including overnight care
- My ex-husbands consistent breach of court orders leaving me unable to secure set permanent working hours
- Having to attend my sons social activities (cubs, swimming lessons, basketball games) meaning that I could not take extra responsibility at work therefore effectively stopping me from moving up the ladder professionally
- The cost of childcare. If you are on a pension it is cheaper for childcare. If you do not get a lot of assistance then it can be expensive, for example:

Childcare after school hours cost \$27 per day = \$135 per week

Income take home per week = \$500.

This leaves \$365.00 to pay for the mortgage, food, bills petrol etc and that is not a lot.

I went back to court in 2001 to change orders as I was moving to the country as it was becoming increasingly expensive and difficult to live in the city. Orders for contact were changed and again my ex-husband still did not adhere to these consistently NOT returning my son after access visits, (again the police did not assist.)

My career has suffered as I have not been able to accept promotions due to my child's school hours, the lack of childcare (there is currently no before school care available and approx a 12 month wait for after school care on a full time basis where I am living), external activities and my ex-husbands erratic behaviour with contact visits.

I have not been able to afford the time or money to take my ex-husband to court to charge him as I find the process drawn out and frustrating and I believe it would have a negative impact on my child with both parents constantly going to court.

I am now (again) in the process of going through court to amend orders as my son wishes to reduce contact as he can't attend his sport on weekends as his father is unwilling to take him to these events. This process was started in Jan 03 and will be finalised in Sept 03. This is a 9-month process involving a minimum of \$2500 to date and I dread to think of the final cost when it is finished. The solicitor has put a caveat over my property so if I don't pay my bill they can sell my house.

I believe my career has suffered because of the consequences of raising my child by myself but I feel very fortunate that I have managed to slowly gain the qualifications to assist in my career once my son is able to be left on his own after school. Over the last 7 years I have managed to undertake courses by correspondence and now have a massive HECS debt that will take years to pay off, by the time it is paid off my son will be at University.

I do believe that I am an exception to the working single mum model as I have the self-respect and am proud that I have never relied on the Government for a pension (I registered but did not receive any assistance as I was working) and now have a Masters degree and have been accepted into my Doctoral degree.

I find this an achievement for someone who was told to go and live in a women's shelter by a magistrate who clearly did not understand the role of a woman and a child who was living within a violent marriage.

I do not have financial security as I can only work casually from week to week due to my son's school activities but at least I am able to (just) pay my mortgage, my bills and can contribute to my son's wellbeing by being home for him after school each day.

I am aware of other single mothers who cannot work, educate themselves or purchase property and are struggling to pay the rent and put food on the table. I have empathy and understanding for these women, as I know how hard it is.

I think it is abysmal that the Government does not assist working single parents by giving them more financial assistance, aids and incentives to help them further their career. This could be in the form of:

1. Increasing childcare hours after business hours up to 11pm and/or overnight
2. Make more places accessible for childcare
3. Financial incentives, possibly giving higher rebates for childcare
4. Lowering HECS fees to encourage study
5. Give more places to universities for adult entries and encourage distance education
6. More flexibility/access within the court system to speed up processes
7. Realise that women work 24 hours per day. They work 8 -10 hours in business then have to come home and start again by doing shopping, cleaning, cooking, childcare, housework washing etc.

I hope a glimpse into my life experience can help you in this inquiry.

Please feel free to contact me or use any part of this statement that is useful.