

June 30, 2008

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

SUBMISSION - INQUIRY INTO BETTER SUPPORT FOR CARERS

I have received the letter from Carers Australia informing me of an inquiry being conducted at the moment by the Australian Government to find out how to better meet the needs of family carers.

I am a parent of a child with a disability and am also facilitator of the MyTime group in Bairnsdale, Victoria.

Remote Family Services UnitingCare has set up a MyTime group based at the Uniting Church in Bairnsdale. MyTime groups are support groups for parents and carers of a child with a disability. We have two play helpers who lead the children and their siblings in activities so parents can spend time focusing on catching up with others in similar situations as well as accessing resources and information to help them with their child's disability. This is a very practical measure of supporting carers in our area.

I am aware that there are many other MyTime groups operating at the moment in Victoria (auspiced under Playgroup Vic and funded by FaHCSIA).

The East Gippsland area has a high level of isolation due to remoteness. Financial restrictions create barriers to connecting with the broader community due to the intensity of the caring role.

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Access to main stream play groups can be severely restricted for many parents of children with disabilities due to the complex needs of children with disabilities. Currently there is no existing group in East Gippsland that supports parents and children and gives parents time to socialise while the child is being cared for by staff experienced in caring for children with complex needs.

The MyTime program is the answer to solving this issue in East Gippsland and there is the potential for many carers to be supported through the MyTime program. However MyTime funding is very limited, only providing for one facilitator and one play helper for the duration of the two hour session. Remote Family Services UnitingCare have employed another play helper for the duration of this session which is being subsidized by RFSUC.

MyTime funding also only funds for 8 week terms - last term was 12 weeks and next term is 11 weeks. Parents of children with special needs often feel isolated and hesitant to join and participate in groups such as this. So once these parents and their children have settled into the group we feel there is a need for consistency and we would like to be able to offer this service to families for the full number of weeks in a term.

Our group commenced in February this year and we have found MyTime funding hopelessly inadequate and are desperately looking for more funding so as to more adequately support these families.

Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, has recently announced additional funding to pilot four new MyTime groups.

To operate this program to its full potential and ensure that good outcomes are achieved for families and children, funding for current MyTime groups really needs to be revised before any more MyTime groups are initiated. This program has the potential to help many more carers than it does at present.

Government Initiatives such as the MyTime groups are a fantastic idea of how to better support carers but they really need to be funded properly so they can make a difference.



ROSE McKENNA
MyTime Facilitator
Bairnsdale

Ph. 03 51 576218