

Snjezana

18 June 2008

Committee Secretariat
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 Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry into Better Support for Carers

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

I am submitting to the Inquiry because I am a mother with two children, aged 10 and 12 years, who have moderate disabilities. I am feeling overwhelmed and stressed with my current situation and have an underlying anxiety about the future directions of my disabled children. I am angry about the lack of current support and assistance to carers and their families. I also feel disillusioned by the Governments lack of commitment to addressing the long term needs of the disabled and their carers.

1. The role and contribution of carers in society

As a carer, I feel that my role is to love, nurture and support my children. As a carer with two children with disability my responsibility is to make sure they have the financial security and get the health and social services they need to have a happy and secure life.

As a carer and in particular, a tax payer and an Australian citizen, I believe my family have the right to good quality and affordable health care, housing, education and employment, now and in the future.

2. The barriers to social and economic participation for carers

As a carer I face the following problems:

- My own emotional and mental health deterioration as I try to cope with the usual life stresses and rising cost of living and then also trying to make sure that my two children with disabilities are receiving enough services and education so they can have some security and a good quality of life in their adulthood before I become too ill or die prematurely.
- I don't know what the future holds for my two children (aged 10 & 12) with a disability.
- My partner and I are already struggling and I don't know how I am going to financial support my disabled children throughout their adulthood lives, in the many years to come.
- I do not have any case management and desperately need a case worker to help me access appropriate services, funding and information for me to be informed about what is "out there", how do I access it, and how I can best advocate for my children's needs and welfare. This situation is made even more difficult to access because I live in the country, the Grampians region, and my nearest service area is Ballarat which is 50 minutes away by car.
- As a working mother, my carer prospects are limited and my income is relatively low. I usually find work which is casual or part time but the child care cost for after school care, the cost of travel and the amount of tax taken out from my gross salary doesn't make it worthwhile to work. This in turn affects my mental and social health and our family's economic situation.
- I have limited choices to affordable and flexible respites services in my rural area.

3. The practical measures and some suggested strategies to better support carers:

- More financial assistance to carer support groups, particularly in rural areas so carers can have access to resources, workshops, seminars and social outings.
- More financial assistance: continually hearing how carers are saving the Federal government billions of dollars so why isn't more money be allocated to carers, in particular carers allowance, to show that the government respects and appreciates what we carers are doing. One off carer payments of \$600 are a form of tokenism.
- Also disability pensions need to be increased so carers are not subsidising the government yet again and have to give further financial assistance to their children because the pension is not enough to live on.

- The government needs to be more flexible, creative and provide more financial assistance to carers. More tax breaks for the carers, for example: raising the income thresholds for Centrelink payments to \$100,000 to compensate for the rising cost of living and the extra costs incurred to the carer and their family to support their children with disabilities; in the general tax scheme, carers could pay less tax off their gross income to compensate for the higher financial costs of caring for a disabled family member; family tax benefits payments could be increased etc...
- More affordable access to neuro psychologists and other allied health care professionals such as speech therapists for those with a disability. Also more affordable access to psychologists and counsellors for the carers who need their assistance in coping with hardships and the emotional stresses which affect personal relationships, marriages and the family. So carers who are receiving carer payments do not have to pay for these sessions and are not forced to take private health insurance to cover the costs and still be out of pocket.
- More creative, affordable and safe options for independent living and residential housing for young people and adults with disabilities so they have some independence and good quality of life
- More flexible work place practices which are "carer and family friendly". Workplace discrimination does exist in particular for female primary carers who are perceived as a risk or less reliable or productive because they may be called away from work more often because of their carer responsibilities. So there are less jobs available to those women particularly part time, job shares and working from home. Workplaces across the board need to think outside the square and provide more supportive, creative and flexible employment opportunities.
- More vocational training and educational opportunities (e.g., VCAL, VET, Apprenticeships and Partnerships with industries and employer groups) and secondary education for adolescence and young people with disabilities. So they have access to choices and opportunities for employment, independent living and a productive future and good quality of life. This then means that educational institutions at secondary and tertiary level need more funding and resources for integrated programs and special education in mainstream schools as well as the development of special education secondary colleges for those adolescence which have a low IQ.
- Carers need access to computers in the home so they can stay connected, informed and have access to services, organisations and help services on line and also to prevent them from being socially isolated. Also broad band is not available across the board especially those carers in rural and remoter area's of the country. The government could provide for an initiative to get those carers who don't have one to get a PC.

As a carer I face similar problems to most working class families. However, having two children with disabilities adds a lot more family pressures and financial stress.

So I believe the solutions lie in the more distal factors which contribute to my problems and that is where the Governments (Federal and State) needs to be far more insightful and focus on more long term and sustainable initiative so that the current children and young people with disabilities are not going to be further disadvantaged and marginalised. Making their lives more productive and meeting their needs will make my life as a carer in the years to come a little easier.

Thank you for taking my views into consideration as part of the Committee's Inquiry. I look forward to reviewing any recommendations you make to improve life for carers in Australia.

Yours sincerely

Srjezana