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Submission No. 654
(Inq into better support for carers)

AOC 10/7/08

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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

30th June 2008

To whom it may concern

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Better Support for Carers

Please find attached the response from Australian Polish Community Services (APCS) to the above-mentioned inquiry. Also find enclosed a copy of the report, *It's my duty: A report of the stressors, coping mechanisms and use of services by Polish carers*, produced by APCS in 2000. Many of the issues identified in this report are still relevant for Polish carers today.

If you require any further information, please don't hesitate to contact me on 03 8371 2310 or via e-mail: spo@acps.org.au

Yours truly,

Wendy Bennett
Acting CEO

Inquiry into Better Support for Carers

Experiences of Polish carers as related to staff of Australian Polish Community Services:

Issues identified by Polish born / Polish speaking carers & those caring for members of the Polish community

- ❖ language barrier and a lack of awareness about available services
- ❖ available services are often not responsive to carers' needs, especially in response to linguistic and cultural diversity and the provision of appropriate care. Carers are reluctant to access respite services to take a break due to the lack of Polish speaking respite staff available to care for the care recipient
- ❖ carers of young and disabled people have indicated that they feel there is little support available to assist them
- ❖ many carers do not view themselves as carers and do not recognize the level of responsibility they carry
- ❖ as a result, carers are not aware how important it is to look after their own wellbeing in order to be able to help others; for many, the concept of relaxation and self care still remain very new and unexplored areas
- ❖ caring can be described as a matter of pride and honour within the Polish community, and for that reason, many do not seek help or claim carers' allowances, as they feel totally responsible to provide all required assistance themselves with no financial contribution from other sources
- ❖ when the carer is responsible for caring for someone with a disability (physical or cognitive) or a mental illness, the stigma surrounding these issues in the community results in the carer "going it alone" rather than to let others know of their needs or issues
- ❖ those who try to access services often find they are not very responsive to their needs (especially those most disadvantaged, such as single mothers with children with disabilities with limited sources of support and finance);

- ❖ many carers feel lost and confused looking for available services as the system is very complex and often overloaded and doesn't always take into consideration the language supports that may be required to navigate the system; one needs to be very persistent to find the required assistance and this can contribute to carers' frustration
- ❖ some carers do not utilise available services due to their cost
- ❖ organizing respite takes too much time - very long waiting list before gaining access to services
- ❖ carers stress is a significant issue impacting on carers' health
- ❖ many carers experience mental health problems (e.g. depression, anxiety) as a result of their caring role but these issues also remain overlooked which contributes to increased deterioration of their general wellbeing; as a result, the health condition of many carers is often worse than the physical condition of the people they look after. However, this factor is hardly ever recognised
- ❖ the aftermath of caring leaves permanent damage / scars on the wellbeing of many carers long after their caring role is over

APCS recently delivered sessions for Polish carers about self care in two metropolitan locations. Some of the feedback from participants identified that the most important knowledge gained from the session included:

- ❖ knowledge about where to seek help if in need e.g. counseling services
- ❖ importance of relaxation and having time for oneself
- ❖ depression, dementia & mental illness in general
- ❖ how to deal with stress
- ❖ how to best help people we are caring for (to look after their wellbeing and the carers wellbeing).

Participants also indicated in an interest in further sessions that covered:

- ❖ more information on this topic
- ❖ more information from 'beyondblue'
- ❖ continuation of the same topic plus more information on where to seek help

- ❖ health information about diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis (some indicated that they sought this kind of information from their GPs)
- ❖ more information about stress
- ❖ more information about communication.

All respondents noted that the session changed their understanding of the topic in a positive way. This was due to the fact that the presenters understood the Polish culture and were able to present the topic in Polish.