

**SUTHERLAND SHIRE  
DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION  
ACTION GROUP INC.**

**P O Box 906  
Gymea 2227  
NSW  
[bifoord@bigpond.net.au](mailto:bifoord@bigpond.net.au)**

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

1 July 2008

Dear Parliamentary Secretary

**Inquiry into Better Support for Carers**

I am writing to you as President of the Sutherland Shire Disability Accommodation Action Group Inc. We are a group of Carers who have come together because we are concerned about many important issues affecting us as Carers. We acknowledge that this is a national problem, and we are not alone in voicing our concerns.

Our Organisation was incorporated in October 2006 and held public meetings at Sutherland in February, March and October in 2007. Over 260 Carers attended these meetings. A 'Register of Need' for supported accommodation has been established and clearly documents the degree of concern of carers about their caring role and the future of themselves and their sons and daughters with a disability. Although only a snap shot of the Sutherland Shire, we believe this would be fairly representative of the crisis facing Carers across the nation.

### Challenges:

#### **The role and contribution of carers in society and how this should be recognized.**

The important role of Carers is unrecognized and devalued. We are constantly being asked to 'tell our stories' yet see no improvement to the quality of our lives. Carers should not have to beg and continually campaign for the right to have a basic quality of life for themselves, their son or daughter. Many of our members are young female carers who have been forced to give up their careers and remain at home to manage with their son or daughter who has challenging behaviour, whilst trying to give the rest of the family as normal a life as possible. Many have given up the hope of a long standing relationship with a partner who is able to cope with living with a person with a disability. Others are ageing carers who have often neglected their own well being, are tired, and exhausted; suffer from poor mental and physical health and who are fearful about the lack of long term planning for the future care needs of their sons and daughters.

All of our members came into their caring role by 'accident', not a Career they would have chosen, yet admit that although 'caring' has its rewards is a solitary, lonely unpredictable life, often filled with immense love, heartache and an ongoing sadness.

### ***Solutions:***

- a) Service Providers to have a Policy/standard on how Carers should be treated i.e. with dignity and respect and they should be monitored against this standard
- b) Presently clients are said to be involved in the planning of the services they receive, but usually this is only lip service and should be monitored, with best practice documented
- c) Complaints made by carers in relation to services that impact on them should be treated seriously and monitored by an Advisory Committee who reports back to Government
- d) Provision of permanent, supported accommodation for people with a disability as required by carers
- e) Education via media and through the health system of health professionals so they treat people with a disability and Carers with respect
- f) Employers given incentives to employ Carers
- g) Establish a 'futures' fund to provide for Carers superannuation.

#### **The barriers to social and economic participation for carers, with a particular focus on helping carers to find and/retain employment.**

Many carers try to live on income below the poverty line, less than the basic wage and struggle to save for the future and women are particularly disadvantaged in their ability to accumulate retirement savings. There is no money for socialization or education. Access to transport is often a barrier as is Carer 'unfriendly' employers.

***Solution:***

- a) Pay Carers the same as an unemployed person, plus 9% superannuation, so that they can then choose to stay at home or pay for someone else to share the caring role
- b) Extend the hours of Community Participation and Transition to Work hours to accommodate working parents
- c) Increase the incentives for OOSH Programs to take a child with a disability
- d) Fund Carers an 'Attendant Care' type of package to purchase their own respite to be used for work.
- e) Encourage employers to see the value in part time work for Carers
- f) Provide supported accommodation in a shared care arrangement where the person with a disability lives in care part time and at home part time so the Carer can work part time.

**The practical measures required to better support carers, including key priorities for action.**

Many female Carers have lost hope of using the skills gained during their early life, be it a university degree, traineeship or working with others - their skills are wasted.

Before and after school care and holiday care is usually not available.

Out of school hours care for a child over 12 years is usually non existent or very expensive with Home Care saying they do not provide after school care.

***Solution:***

- a) The provision of quality, available care with trained staff from 7 a.m. to school or day program commencement and then again from 3 p.m. until 8 p.m. for working parents. This could be in home or centre based
- b) Legislation to improve policies and practices of employers regarding the employment of carers.

The influx of skilled Carers into the workforce would go a long way to elevating the skills shortage Australia is facing. It would also take the pressure off families requesting supported accommodation.

**Strategies to assist carers to access the same range of opportunities and choices as the wider community, including strategies to increase**

**the capacity for carers to make choices within their caring roles, transition into and out of caring, and effectively plan for the future.**

***Solution:***

- a) Increase the Carers Pension to the same level as the minimum wage.
- b) Provide CACP or Each Packages for Carers to purchase hours of care to enable them to work at least part time
- c) Pay Carers the same as an unemployed person, plus 9% superannuation, so that they can then choose to stay at home or pay for someone else to share the caring role
- d) Provide appropriate, quality supported accommodation options to our sons and daughters when required
- e) Work with Carers in a genuine manner to plan for the short & long term future
- f) Provide better behaviour support intervention for people with challenging behaviour
- g) Provide access to modified vehicles and equipment
- h) Don't talk about transition in and out of the caring role unless there is genuine government commitment to assist.

Yours sincerely

Judy Foord  
President  
Sutherland Shire Disability Accommodation Action Group Inc.