

Submission No. 984

(Inq into better support for carers)

Aoe 21/7/08

Some thoughts on how we may be able to better support and recognize carers and those needing care.

The easy things first.

For me having my role as a carer recognized as a job.

I love dad to bits but cleaning his bottom and shaving and washing and spoon feeding him is the hardest and most unpleasant job I have ever had both physically and emotionally and yet it is not recognized by society as a job, it can't be because what other form of employment pays on what income and assets one has.

This is a big issue for me, I work really hard as a carer and I want my work recognized by treating my pay as everyone else's pay is treated.

Apart from this perhaps strange need to have my input into society recognize because carer payment isn't a wage as such, my retirement income is being eroded further by pensions rules being applied to the carers payment.

Another area that need to change, Centrelink assess respite care by calendar year Dept of Ageing assess it by financial year. This lead to a real problem for me with my last respite care. Please fix this so both Depts operate on the same period of time.

Another area needing change, dad's condition is not curable so why have him assess every 12 months for respite care, he isn't going to get better it would be really lovely to think he might but he isn't. This seems an unnecessary waste of resources and ACAT staff have enough to do without doing unnecessary jobs.

Another area, there is ample evidence that institutional care is not the best form of care, in fact it is simply dreadful and anything that can replace that has to be a plus.

At present I have to place dad in a nursing home for my respite care only because there isn't any option at the moment but he always returns home with some health issues, all through neglect e.g. urine burns on his back with little festers, pressure point sores, diarrhoea because "everyone gets laxatives even if they have had diarrhoea for a fortnight" I was told when I asked that dad not be given a laxative as he didn't need them.

I would like to see carer's given the option of being able to provide care in the home. This seems to me to be a much kinder solution for carer and caree. The carer could be responsible for asking someone they and the caree knew and trust to provide the respite in the home. Also dad needs to be transport by ambulance and just arranging it can be a hassle and not the best use of an ambulance (last respite the ambulance arrived 8 hours later than requested and one requests not books an ambulance as I was so firmly told

when I rang to check the ambulance had been booked because I'm allowed to request an ambulance) There is also a feeling of guilt that one is taking up other people time to get dad to respite.

Now to the harder issues.

Institutional child care was an accepted part of belief system up until about the 1970's, children's homes abound now I'm not sure there are any, we have to start to treat our senior members of society with the same compassion and respect that we decided was appropriate and affordable for the younger members of society.

My ideas maybe fanciful but we to be brainstorming ideas.

How to enlarge our pool of carers?

If we were to pay the single rate of carers payment (income and asset tested free) to people who would take on the role, given the usual checks surrounding employment we may find for example, people in a family situation where one parent would like to stay home and care for the child/children but can't afford to may think of fostering caring and older person.

Why can't we look at fostering caring seniors the same as the young?

Why not think about providing mobile homes to be placed in people yards like a granny flat, this could work well for people requiring hostel care or why not group homes? The additional benefits of these two suggestions is when the age population increases or decreases these facilities can be used for other purposes. To keep building nursing homes for a population that will increase and then decrease again doesn't seem smart to me especially when we know this is worst form of care.

Other groups of people who maybe interested in this work are people already in the social security system such as widows allowance, parenting payment, newstart allowance all of these people would receive greater income with less reporting requirements than their present payment. Some of these people already do casual respite work. There are two problems for these people, currently they will only do work up until the point where their payment will not be cancelled and secondly sometimes the work falls off so they do not know what their income is going to be at any given time. In the past I have spoken with people in this situation and they thought it would great to have certainty of income.

Another pool of people could be people who if given extended leave without pay from their job so it wasn't a case of care for someone vs unemployment.

The government could do this for their own staff to a larger extent than they do and support employers who would provide their staff with such leave.

One way of supporting a system like this would be to allow the carer to stay on carers payment until the employer again had a position vacant or the carer found other employment. There would need to be some restriction on this proposal as with about everything I have suggested but lets start thinking, the details can be worked out.

I would find it difficult to believe that anything I have suggested would be more expensive than the system we currently have. My neighbor who is paid to help for 1 hour a day currently receives about \$330.00 per fortnight (my assets and income tested carers payment is \$452.48 per fortnight) how much that 14 hours actually costs the taxpayer really need to be worked out there, is administrative staff, office equipment, rent etc.

When dad first come to stay with me in 2001 I received 4 hours of respite a week. The worker received \$18.00 per hour, the agency who sent the worker received \$12.00 per hour this amount does not include the community options worker who referred me to the agency who referred the worker to me, salary, office equipment and rent. So I estimate it cost the taxpayer minimum \$40.00 an hour. I can't remember what carers payment was, the time but I don't expect it was a lot more than \$320.00 per fortnight.

This is another one of my BIG issues so much money goes into administration and so little into providing for the people that the system is set up for. (It would be interesting to know how many organizations/groups we have and fund to provide care and how many hours of care is received). For people receiving carer's payment and allowance at least it would almost be as cheap to pay two carer payments for the one person, maybe that needs to be defined somewhat further e.g if granted two carers payments for the one person then nine weeks respite would not be available maybe a normal four weeks annual leave. The quality of my life would change dramatically if I had shared care.

Now for a real fantasy, wouldn't it be good if we could (and we can if we try hard enough) develop the notion of caring/supporting someone was a good in itself and we all had an obligation to give some part of our life no longer than five years to this task, as a pay back for all we have received by being lucky enough to be born in Australia. Children and the elderly can be a very neglect groups in our society. All the recent cases of child neglect is inexcusable and the responsibility doesn't all rest with governments.