



The Hon Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs

Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Telephone: (02) 6277 7560
Facsimile: (02) 6273 4122

MC08-036453

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Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Irwin *Julia*

Thank you for your letter of 4 December 2008 about a petition on early intervention services for children with disability received by the Standing Committee on Petitions from the Member for Farrer, the Hon Sussan Ley MP. This petition makes specific reference to the Woodstock Early Childhood Early Intervention Service supporting Albury and surrounding rural areas. As requested, I am responding to the issues raised in the petition.

The Commonwealth Government is committed to working cooperatively with State and Territory Governments to strengthen all services for people with disability, including early childhood intervention services.

As you may be aware, the Council of Australian Governments has committed to a new National Disability Agreement, which commenced in January 2009. Under the new agreement, the Commonwealth Government will contribute \$5.3 billion to state and territory-run services over the next five years, including \$1.33 billion for NSW. The agreement means that by 2013, the Commonwealth Government's annual contribution to assist NSW will be \$408 million, compared to \$217 million in 2007.

The Commonwealth Government has also committed to providing improved support for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), their families and carers. To help address the need for support and services for children with ASDs, the Government is delivering the \$190 million Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package.

Under this package, all children aged six and under who are diagnosed with an ASD and are not yet at school will have access to up to \$12,000 (\$6,000 a financial year) in essential early intervention support. Families will use this funding package to choose the early intervention services that best suit their child from an Early Intervention Service Provider Panel.

I understand that staff from my Department have been in contact with Woodstock Support Inc, and have offered to meet with them at their office in Albury to discuss the delivery of services under the HCWA package. My Department has also extended an invitation to Woodstock Support Inc to submit an application by forming a consortium with other providers in the Albury/Wodonga areas.

As part of an ongoing commitment to the rights of people with disability, the Commonwealth Government is developing a National Disability Strategy. The Strategy is being developed in close consultation with the Australian community, disability and carer peak bodies, employers, industry experts and State and Territory Governments. Please be assured that the issues raised in the petition concerning early childhood intervention services for children with disability will be considered as part of the consultation process for this Strategy.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely

JENNY MACKLIN MP