

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

29 June 2008

## **Inquiry into better support for carers**

### **Who we are?**

We are an informal group of carers living in Alice Springs who are connected through our roles as carers for loved ones particularly frail aged living with dementia and all living at home.

### **Our motivation and premise:**

- We have not been encouraged by the quality and level of services provided in Alice Springs and are astounded at the lack of accountability in the current age care” package’ schemes – **‘quality is a figment of our imagination’**
- We cannot change the conditions/circumstances of those we are caring for so acceptance, staying positive and becoming pragmatic has been the way forward – **‘we can only change our behaviours and responses, nobody else’s’**
- It is our choice to share the caring of our loved ones as together we travel the ‘carers’ journey. We do not see ourselves as victims of our circumstances but rather as initiators and facilitators to change individual attitudes, government policy and service provider’s output – **‘the power of choice’**
- Sharing the care is inclusive of governments, service providers and direct and extended family members. We see partnership arrangements as the most effective means of caring – **‘the more the merrier’**

Our suggestions have been placed under discrete headings for ease of non duplication only - they may overlap other headings. The suggestions offer our insight based on practical experience and are as follows:

### ***the role and contribution of carers in society and how this should be recognised;***

- More awareness campaigns highlighting the positive aspect about the role of caring. Too often the focus is on the negative side (to get

across often a political point) when we could be focussing on the positives. Yes, there is a positive aspect of caring; here is one of ours – we are now the proud owners of a pianola with a 1000 roll collection. The repetitive query of “where is our pianola?” created an interest to find one for the family.

- Segment ‘carers’ as a useful, valued and worthwhile part of society and market this. Carers’ contributions are saving tax payers astounding amounts of money so calculate the savings and celebrate with a bonus at times
- Market the family values aspects of caring and take on board some of the Eastern philosophies such as honour and privilege, pride and quality etc
- Connect carers back to businesses and community in positive ways. For example local communities can create carer databases and attract corporate and community sponsorship for carers birthday cards or presents. Kmart sponsor a Xmas tree each year for people to donate a present, someone could be sponsoring a carer with a birthday card or present.

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

- Introduce a voluntary/mandatory Carers Service Leave scheme (it could replace Long Service Leave as we know that LSL will probably not apply to Gen X, Y and Millennials. From a certain age people have a choice to accumulate Carers Service Leave to take at a time in the future when it is required. Access could be full pay, half pay, even a quarter pay to cover bills etc during times of caring. It would need to be transferable from places of employment and jobs can be retained whilst on Carer Service Leave. This is an innovative solution to high numbers of baby boomers who will not accept the current levels of age care servicing and low numbers of residential beds
- Educate employers about the role of carers and widen various Carers Recognition Acts to all employers

***the practical measures required to better support carers, including key priorities for action;***

- Time is never ones own when caring so bill paying, taxation returns general paperwork is always hard to keep on track. Carers get regular penalties for late lodgement of tax returns, phone bills etc. Recognised carers could get automatic extension of times in their bills.
- Offer discounts as with Defence people on rates, taxes, utilities, etc Have a CarerCom Card and encourage businesses to give discounts for non paid carers
- Introduce a National service model for caring - offer work placements in gap years to students to work in aged care, disabilities, mental health facilities etc for a 10% reduction in HECS. It could have a profound impact on young people to make better choices around


drugs, alcohol etc earlier on in their lives. It may also provide them with some practical experience aligned to their future studies. The mechanism already exists through Local Community Partnerships and Industry Career Advisors networks to link future careers, students and employers

- Offer regional incentives to move people from the city back to the bush for a job and caring role – eg if a family is relocating to assist in caring for a family member offer remote area taxation benefits, assistance with removal costs, etc
- Better connect carers in isolated areas with the wider use of technology and IT interface (particularly in rural and regional areas) eg link carers through secured chat rooms, skype conferencing etc. There are younger carers who are very familiar with technology but not familiar with the role and responsibilities associated with caring. Develop information etc and market as cyber-care.
- Have a national scheme for powers of attorneys and guardianship rather than a fragmented state/territory by state/territory scheme
- Keep carer processes less bureaucratic and more person-directed.

***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***

- Educate carers so that they can make better choices and identify that they do have some choice within the caring role. Formalise any training and create training opportunities to encourage families to “share the care” – inadvertently creating a trained workforce who when their direct caring is over, may wish to continue in formal carer’s job
- Incorporate ‘care plans for Carers’, not only frail, aged, disabled etc. Create a holistic approach to carers from the start of their journey until after their journey
- Encourage cross border caring between families – subsidise and assist families to take turns in caring for a parent.
- Broaden the focus of service provider’s policy to include family and the family environment, not just the client.

Regards



Raelene