

STANDING COMMITTEE
- 2 AUG 2007
on Family and Human Services

RECEIVED
1 AUG 2007
BY: Jc.

Submission No: 183

AUTHORISED: 818107

30/07/07.

Dear Ms. Bishop.

My name is Suzanne Steep and my husband Clarrie and myself are raising our four grandchildren Mitchell, Maddison, Michael and Meg, and have for the past nine years. About that time nine years ago I had arranged to look after the two eldest children because my daughter Monika had to go into hospital to have an operation. This wasn't a problem because I had been looking after Maddison and Mitchell since they were babies. When we made these arrangements my daughter was living at the coast but had to leave the house because she couldn't pay the rent because of drugs and alcohol. The other two children were to be looked after by her husband Mathew who is the father of the youngest girl Meg. He took off as he couldn't handle life without drugs and couldn't get out of bed before midday so Monika was staying at the Moruya refuge for battered women. She was there under false pretenses and Rose a worker with D.O.C.S. at Batemans Bay rang me and asked would we take the four children as Monika had left the children unattended and went out on the town and didn't return until next day. We were asked to pick up the children, if not they were going to be fostered out to separate families. This is a condensed version of what transpired and for D.O.C.S. to require this drastic step was a culmination of the children left many times with many people and all involved in the drug world. Our daughter was a dealer and user and had an association with the REBELS at Batemans Bay. She ran drugs from Batemans Bay to Canberra with the children on board as cover and was also known to sell to school children. The children also were used to pick up drugs thrown from a boat onto the back yard and also down the driveway by a member of the gang on a motorbike. she rented a house at Nelligen right on the water. These things we know because of evidence obtained during our custody hearings in the family law court. Our daughter was always in the spotlight with the police for shoplifting and she bragged that the four children were her shoplifting gang. She had to shoplift and sell drugs to feed her habit and the children suffered from lack of food and fresh fruit and vegetables, always sick and as a result from all the visits to the doctors and antibiotics the children all have soft teeth. The police at Batemans Bay offered to put her in a witness protection program for her knowledge of the rebels but she told us that they wouldn't have anywhere to put her and ensure her safety. she fled Batemans Bay and returned to Canberra demanded her children back and as we had no legal papers for their custody we had to hand them back. Over the next couple of months we learnt they were staying with approx seven different people in Canberra as my daughter couldn't get accommodation here as her and her husband had fled to the coast after he had trashed the place they were living in at . Approx \$15000 in unpaid rent and damage so she had no chance of getting subsidized accommodation in Canberra. My husband learnt that Mathew had the children in a male refuge at Belconnen trying to force the A.C.T. govt into giving them accommodation. That was when we decided to go for custody. This wasn't a prolonged affair as my daughter didn't fight for her children. All up we paid approx \$17000 for our legal people and the only time Monika appeared at the family court for counseling she had track marks between her toes as she had no veins left in her arms to shoot up in. Mathew had disappeared into the wild blue yonder by this time. The two eldest children's father was a one night stand and didn't want anything to do with them. He was also a bikie and Michael's father was also gone. Justice Folks awarded us full custody of the children in February 2000. We came to Canberra in 1969 with the N.S.W. Fire Brigades and were allocated a 2 bedroom home which was later converted to a 3 bedroom home. We raised our three children at this address and did all the same things as everyone else did. Struggle. But we got there. Now we had four children to care for and love. My husband worked for 35 years in the fire brigade and retired early in 2000 to help with the raising of the children. The money he received from his C.S.S.

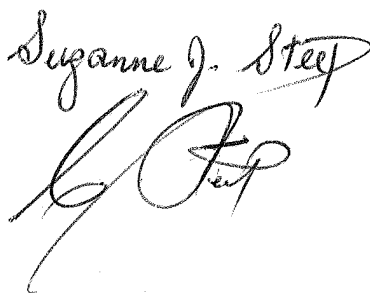
Super was used to extend our home and give them each a bedroom as well as a bit more room for all of us as the original house was 9.8 squares. We also had a four bedroom house at Tuross Heads that my husband owner built which we had to sell to finish off our house in . We manage the children's welfare on my husbands C.S.S. pension plus family tax benefit A. and I get \$180 parenting for which Centrelink has been hassling me to go to work even though I am exempt under large family i.e. 4 children under our care. My husband receives a part pension as he turned 65 in Feb this year. We do okay as we shop carefully and the children want for nothing. They are involved in music both at school and with piano with a teacher all play musical instruments as they are quite good. Three of the children are in high school and 2008 we will have all of them there. As we have full custody we are not entitled to careers money and not entitled to legal aid as we own our home and have too may assets. The only respite we have had is we found out we are entitled to full child care during the holidays under the grandparent's benefits which enabled us to put them into a holiday program for 8 days.

Our daughter died in November 2000 from heroin and we also had to pick up the pieces and bury her as her husband wasn't there for even this sad occasion we have hid nothing from the children and emphasize the importance of honesty and not stealing respect for each other and others around them. Its been a long hard slog as the children had bad habits when we got them but slowly as they mature they are learning the values of life but we have had a lot if interference along the way too detailed to go into but suffice to say it has added to the stress we have had to endure with raising these children as our only intention was to give them love and affection and a safe and stable environment that they now call home. When we were awarded custody Justice Folks commented as we left the court "best of luck you have a long hard row to hoe" and he was right. Even with all we have had to put up with we wouldn't change anything as we regard children as the jewels of our future and they deserve all the help and understanding that we are capable of.

Will close now and if you require anything from us we would only be to happy to oblige as we are open and honest in who we are. I believe you have perused the grandparent story, the book that was published by Canberra Mothercraft Society and all of the stories are there because of drugs and alcohol and grandparents picking up the pieces. '

Regards

Suzanne and Clarrie Steep

The image shows two handwritten signatures in cursive. The top signature is 'Suzanne J. Steep' and the bottom signature is 'Clarrie Steep'. Both are written in dark ink on a white background.