



To: The Secretary of the House Standing Committee on Family, Community,
Housing and Youth

Inquiry into Better Support for Carers

Terms of Reference Relevant to this Submission

To obtain an improved understanding of the challenges facing carers and their support needs, the committee will inquire into and report on:

- *The role and contribution of carers in society and how this should be recognised;*
- *the practical measures required to better support carers, including key priorities for action*

Issue

Financial support arrangements for student boarding services providing for students with special care needs.

Background

There are many boarding services throughout Australia which provide for school aged children with special care needs. These include residential colleges, student hostels, boarding schools and boarding houses.

These services provide for students who are legally obligated to attend school. They give geographically isolated children the opportunity to attend an appropriate school rather than have to gain their education by way of distance education processes. These boarding services make a significant contribution to the personal development and education of the students in their care. The life skills and personal and social development gained with the support and guidance of boarding staff helps all students realise their potential

Both the Australian and State governments support these students with boarding allowances. Australian Government allowances are provided through the Assistance for Isolated Children, Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY schemes.

The National Association for Rural Student Accommodation has more than ninety boarding service members. These services set boarding fees which enable them to provide a quality boarding service on a group basis. The revenue from fees enables these services to employ staff who can supervise and care for students en masse', that is, most of these services operate with one member of staff on roster at any one time caring for 30 to 40 students. While they can provide for students' individual needs to some extent, they do not have the capacity to care for students who need substantial one-on one care (e.g. some students with significant disabilities or health management requirements).

In recent years more parents have looked to these boarding services to care for students who have been assessed by disability service and health professionals as being in need of a degree on one-on-one care.

While these services meet some of the cost of the one-on-one care from general fee revenue they also negotiate with the parents to assist with the cost of this level of care.

The amount of assistance is usually determined as a proportion of the carers allowance and family assistance provided by the Australian Government. The proportion relates to the time the child is in the care of the boarding service (during school term) relative to the time at home in the care of parents (typically school holidays and some weekends).

There should be no reduction in the carer's allowance or family assistance payment to the parents of students with a disability who needs to board away from home so that the parents can contribute to the cost of care by the boarding service.

It appears that it is current policy for these allowances to be reduced relative to the time the student is being cared for by a boarding service, but that none of this reduction is forwarded on to the boarding service provider caring for the student.

Recommendations

That policy settings and assistance arrangements acknowledge and support the level of care provided by boarding services for students with disabilities and other students with special care needs.

That the level of care to be provided by boarding services for an individual student is determined by appropriately qualified health and disability service professionals.

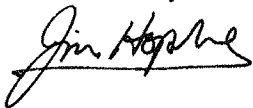
That there is either no reduction in the carers' allowances and family assistance paid to the parents (or other individual carers) where they can show that they are fairly contributing to the cost of care provided by a boarding service provider;

Or...

That if these payments are to be reduced, that there is an adjustment to the boarding allowance paid under the appropriate scheme in respect of geographically isolated students with special care needs which helps meet the additional cost of care as assessed by appropriately qualified health and disability service professionals.

Your favourable consideration of this request would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Jim Hopkins
President
26 May, 2008.