

Doc 4/18/08
Submission No. 1188
 (Inq into better support for carers)---

The Committee Secretary
 Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
 House of Representatives
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT

Dear Secretary

Re: INQUIRY INTO BETTER SUPPORT FOR CARERS

We write as aged carers of a daughter with an intellectual disability. We are aged 77 and 80 and our down syndrome daughter Joanne is 36. She lives with us, works 4 mornings per week and is involved in an art group and a music therapy group. She has a fairly active life, which is the way it should be, but we have to try to keep up. At the moment we are able to do so but the time will come when we won't. The Carers' Allowance is helpful in that we use it to have a house cleaner come in for 2 hours every second week. We drive Joanne to work each morning and collect her at lunch time 4 days a week and the mobility allowance is helpful in this regard. These tasks, of course, limit what other activities we are able to do. It is also relevant to point out that Joanne's mother has never been able to engage in paid employment since Joanne's birth, because of her caring duties. The long-term financial impact upon a family caring for a person with a disability is huge. In addition, the savings to government because of the service provided by family carers is also enormous; in cases such as ours, where these services have been provided for 30, 40 or 50 years, the figure is probably several million dollars. Governments should recognise and acknowledge these facts. When seen in this context, any financial assistance given to aged carers is extremely small.

We make the following suggestions

1. Increase the Carers' Allowance. This would be most helpful to aged carers in that it would enable them to bring help into the home to extend the period of time that they are able to care for their family member with a disability. This would be economically sensible - much cheaper than transferring the family member, or perhaps the parents also, into residential care.
2. Focus on the Carers' Allowance rather than the Carers' Bonus. The bonus is nice to receive for one-off needs, e.g. a new vacuum cleaner, but the Allowance helps carers to plan and set in place services which are needed on a regular basis e.g. house cleaning, garden maintenance, transport to work, assistance with shopping, etc
3. Provide support for home modification. The homes of aged carers who are caring for an adult family member with a disability often need modifications to enable the aging parents and the member with the disability to continue to live in it e.g. ramps instead of steps; wheel chair accessible bath room etc. Support could be provided by way of a cost-sharing subsidy, interest free loans or outright grants.
4. Recruit more well informed and trained support workers. As people age they are less able to cope with the myriad of new rules, regulations, forms, not to mention ever changing information technology. Many carers, we are sure, are missing out on assistance simply because they don't know about them or are unable to handle the application process. Many, we think, miss out because they are just too tired and/or too restricted in the free time available to them to attend information nights or seminars. Well trained support workers, with the time as well as the skills, who could sit down

with aged carers and help them think through their needs and then help them negotiate the path to accessing the best type of support, could make the whole process much more efficient.

We hope these few comments are helpful. We would be happy to discuss them further or give any help to the committee which it may seek.

Yours faithfully

Marge & Jeff