

Submission No. 575  
(Inq into better support for carers)

AOC 1/8/08

**Sent:** Tuesday, 8 July 2008  
**To:** Committee, FCHY (REPS)  
**Subject:** PERSONAL SUBMISSION TO CARERS ENQUIRY

I have Attached to this email a real-life example of my own of how difficult it is to implement the vision of "social inclusion" and, in Appendix at the end of this email, I set out an idea for assisting families find carers to help them with their children. The idea could actually save Governments money!

Currently service providers (including HACC) are finding it very difficult to attract and retain good workers for the work they do caring for people with disabilities in the home and in groups homes and other facilities. I believe that there are many people overseas who would be very willing to take on these roles and, with suitable training, could perform the work admirably.

Australia's immigration rules need to be modified to permit this.

APPENDIX

The Canadian Govt has introduced a class of visa whereby carers can be bought into Canada on a 2 year working visa if they live in a family's home and care for either the elderly, the disabled or children generally. Once they have "served" their 2 years, the carer and his/her family can apply for permanent residence in Canada!! See [www.ci.gc.ca/english/pub/caregiver](http://www.ci.gc.ca/english/pub/caregiver) for more details.

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This would really ease the burden of care in Australia. It would take a lot of the heat out of the childcare places debate as well as helping families caring for the elderly or the disabled. I am the parent of an 11 year old girl who is severely intellectually and physically disabled. I need in-home help caring for my daughter both now and in the long term. I have tried au pairs but they are so transient and are often here just to "party". I have tried out of home carers but they are terribly expensive and also are rarely prepared to come in just for the "high need" times like early morning and often don't turn up as rostered.

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A rough calculation suggests that this approach could save Government approximately \$300 per week per family and result in the family receiving up to twice as many hours help, at the times of their choosing.

I base these statistics on the fact that, in my case, for example, with a "high need" child, I am entitled to receive at least 15 hours per week respite and personal care for myself and my daughter respectively under DADHC's HomeCare program. At \$30 per hour (a very conservative estimate once on-costs and admin time and agencies are factored into the wage paid to the homecare worker), this costs the Government at least \$450 per week. By comparison, if live-in carers are paid the same as au pairs/nannies, they would receive approximately \$150-180 per week plus food and board for 25-30 hours work a week (see [www.peopleforpeople.com.au/html/faq.html](http://www.peopleforpeople.com.au/html/faq.html) for quantitative data). Families would be responsible for the cost of food and board and Government would assist with the wages paid to the live-in carer by a direct payment to the family (a concept that is gaining much ground generally in any event – see the the recent study done on the success of the Attendant Care Program in NSW. I don't have it handy but can locate it if needed).

A live-in carer could potentially gain employment outside the home in which he or she resides to earn more income or could work more hours for the "host family" to increase their weekly income. Another option would be that they could be offered the opportunity to study but, for this to occur, Government would have to be prepared to subsidise their fees to some extent since they could not afford to pay the current fees applicable to international students.

When the Government takes account of the fact that the provision of live-in carers is also highly likely to reduce the demand for out-of-home respite and other forms of in-home respite, the financial savings to the Government become even greater.

## **SOCIAL INCLUSION AT WORK .....OR NOT!**

My daughter, Georgia, has been attending a vacation care centre run by the Ku-ring-gai Council for about 5 years now, about 2 days a week each school holidays. Thanks to Federal "ISS" funding (through FaHCSIA) for inclusion support for children with a disability, an additional carer has been engaged by the Centre on those days to improve the child/carer ratio for the Centre overall.

A week before Georgia turned 11, I received a letter in the mail from Ku-ring-gai Council which read (in full):

"Thank you for your recent usage of Ku-ring-gai Council's St Ives Kids Klub program.

After a recent audit and review of our service, records show that your child Georgia now exceeds the age criteria to attend our Kids Klub programs.

On making enquiries I was advised by Council and my Inclusion Support Officer that the Centre is licensed by DoCS for a limited age group of up to only 10 years of age. Furthermore, nor can Georgia attend the vacation care program that the Council runs for children over 10 years because they only go on outings. Georgia is unable to participate in the outings because the Council cannot hire a wheelchair-accessible bus with anchor points, but, even if they could, they cannot change her nappy or even get her out of the chair on a day outing due to OH&S reasons.

I found myself in the position of having ISS funding, which has no age restriction, but with no place to use that funding.

At that point I drew the matter to the attention of my local State member, Mr Jonathan O'Dea and to my local Federal member, Dr Brendan Nelson.

I received calls from both offices on the same day as my referral.

Their investigations established that there is no age restriction imposed by DoCS on the licensing of Centres. Those restrictions are imposed at a local Council level as a matter of practicality. Notwithstanding this, Councillor Tony Hall had written to Dr Brendan Nelson's office as follows:

"I do not believe the Council Staff can assist any further after reading these representations. It would be for the State MP to seek a DOCS' licence for the child to attend now she is older than the age of 10. Would you let me know if I can help further."

When Council was asked to therefore justify my daughter's exclusion from the Centre, the Council referred to the need for additional equipment to assist with nappy changes (an application for which had been lodged by my Inclusion Support Officer in June 2007,

then lost within FaHCSIA, but for which a relocation was in process). More hurtful, however, was their admission to Mr O'Dea's office that, even if that equipment came through, Council could not find carers willing to work with my daughter. They had had carers ring in sick the days they were scheduled to work with Georgia to avoid having to work with her.

My daughter is wheelchair-bound and does not speak. She sleeps on and off most days due to the drugs she is on for her epilepsy and has no behavioural difficulties. I am at a loss to understand how the Council can justify their exclusion of my child on the basis of an inability to find carers for a child with these characteristics. Their refusal to do so is even more appalling given that supplemental funding is already in place to assist them.

At this point, I don't care if my daughter attends a Centre that has other non-disabled children in attendance or not. However, the number of days offered per school holidays at vacation centres specific to children with a disability is limited to 2 per holidays (even in the long Christmas break) and, in any event, ISS funding can only be used in Centres that are "inclusive" (ie those which also offer services to non-disabled children). I simply want to be able to access a vacation care centre for my daughter like any other parent is entitled to do.

Politicians, the press and the public have embraced "social inclusion" as the new Nevada. Indeed, I was part of the "Social Inclusion, Families and Communities" Stream at the 2020 Summit! The vision is commendable but, judging from the attitude of the Ku-ring-gai Local Council, there is a lot more work to be done before that vision is realized!