

AOC 4/8/08

Submission No. 1128

(Inq into better support for carers)

Sent: Thursday, 24 July 2008 6:21 PM
To: Committee, FCHY (REPS)
Subject: Carers Inquiry Focus Group

Dear Secretary,

I wish to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth's Inquiry into Better Support for Carers.

My name is Tammara I am 18 years of age and for the past 10 years, and I have had the privilege to be a young carer, looking after my father who became wheelchair bound on Valentines Day, 10 years ago. I feel that it is my role to help young carers be recognized and not feel so lonely. They are not the only ones out there who have to care for someone in their family, and there is always someone there to help and listen. I have moved out of home for almost a year now. I work and play sports to keep myself sane and happy, but due to a back injury, I have time off and I am recovering.

I contribute to Australian society of course by working, paying taxes, looking after myself and those around me. Abiding by the law. You could just call me a regular citizen.

When I was looking after my father I faced the following problems such as not having a lot of knowledge and minimal help of how to lift, dress, push and cook for myself and my dad. I found it extremely difficult to concentrate at school because I was teased by students and believe it or not but at one stage at one particular school, I was bullied by the teachers, not all of them, but there was definitely two that did. I found it hard at school because I was constantly worried if the respite worker turned up to help dad. Worried if mum and dad wouldn't argue over nothing. I wanted everything to go back to 'normal'.

I couldn't fully participate in a social life because I was afraid of what people would think of me, I was afraid that because they didn't know what was going on at home, they would bully me. When I was invited to go and see a movie or go shopping, most times I couldn't, simply because someone needed to be home to look after my dad. Mum did most of it but she needed a break and my brother was younger than him so it would have been difficult. My father faced depression after his stroke and because I saw it, I felt depressed because my dad, to me, wasn't the dad that I knew.

I wasn't allowed to have a job because rent would go up, I had to help look after dad and mum and dad barely had any money because the Government doesn't give much allowance. Dad couldn't work, still cant, mum couldn't work but helps a friend out now twice a week if she can so she can get out of the house.

The things that stressed me out the most being a young carer was the fact that it was so rare, no one knew what a young carer was and then when I had explained it, everyone opens their eyes and realize, no one is retarded and stupid and not worth living. Most people are carers and their life in interesting, strong and a lot smarter and wiser as they get older.

I need help with acknowledging who young carers are, what they do and what they need from the government. The United Kingdom are so far ahead of Australia, everyone knows who a young carer is, what they do and they have so much support compared to us. The support we need is respite, for both the carer and person with a disability. Better funding and awareness so the young carer can

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actually go to the chemist and pick up prescriptions and help out with the doctors without being judged. Better support with education because yes, it is really hard. Help finding a job that will suit the young carers needs and flexibility incase there is an emergency in the home.

I used to worry about my future a lot, I was scared that I would spend my whole life looking after my dad, arguing with him everyday. I was afraid I was never going to finish school, and I didn't. I only made it to the end of year 11. I learnt how to be proud of myself and my family for coming this far and for so long I was scared, ashamed, anxious and full of hatred of myself and my family. My life had changed and the only support I had received to help me was from Carers Australia/ Carers ACT, St Vincent de Paul and CYCLOPS. They helped me with school work, attended respite on a 5 day camp with other young carers in Canberra or even day trips with volunteer workers, thanks to the kind hearted people who took time and money to do these things for a small group of kids. I realized that we are special people and there are thousands of us out there that don't even know it. Or afraid to admit it, just like I was. So I strictly focus on the awareness of young carers because if that is achieved then life can be so much easier emotionally and then the more people who know about us, the more that would want to help.

Thank you for taking my views into consideration as part of the committee's inquiry. I look forward to reviewing any recommendations you make to improve life for Carers in Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Tammara